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THE BOY TRAMPS.

BY J. M. HOFFMAN.



JACK WAS A SPLENDID PLAYER, AND NOW, ANIMATED BY THE THOUGHT THAT HE MUST PLEASE THE GIPSIES, THE YOUNG MUSICIAN TRAMP SURPRISED EVEN ANDY BY HIS SKILL.

The Boy Tramps;

OR,

The Roughs of Demon Hollow.

BY J. M. HOFFMAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE LITTLE MUSICIAN.

THINK of a meadow with a path running through it diagonally, the meadow surrounded by a hawthorn hedge, and the path winding in and out among beds of wild roses, stretches of clover and strips of velvet lawn. Think, then, of a rude stile at the end of the path, of a big oak tree bending over it, of a ragged urchin standing on it, of a pair of large brown eyes glancing from the tall grass a little way off, of a handful of buttercups and daisies, of a blue sky and opaline atmosphere, such as are known only in Kentucky on a bright morning in June. Think of all these, I say, then look at that large white house, with its many gables and verandas, standing at the other end of the path, and you have the picture just as it was on that bright June morning more than twenty years ago.

"The home of some farmer swell," said the urchin in rags, as he glanced defiantly at the large white house. "I wonder if there's a dog about that would be likely to invite a feller to leave if he should cross the meadow. I'm 'fraid of dogs."

Such a piratical looking little rascal as was this boy! He might have been fifteen years of age, but he looked younger. His eyes were blue, his hair was flaxen, his face was brown, and his garments, which included the hat which sat rakishly on his head, looked as though they had undergone a state of siege. His occupation—if such it may be called—was that of a roving musician, as evinced by the greasy violin which he held against his breast and over which his fingers moved occasionally.

He gave his hat a turn that made it look even more rakish than before, touched the strings of his violin softly, and again turned his eyes on the large farm-house across the field. A moment he stood there in silence, inhaling the perfume of the meadow, then he said:

"This is a lovely morning, just the kind I've read about in them big love yarns in the papers where the gal and the feller get hitched at the end. I think I never saw the sun shine quite so bright as it does now, nor heard the birds sing so lovely, nor looked at a prettier stretch of lawn; and, come to think of it, I believe I never was so hungry afore as I am now. Somehow, a feller feels just as hungry on a bright day as on any other, or when the birds sing or the roses bloom. It's all very queer. But I must rustle about now. If I thought there wasn't a dog over by that house, I'd go to the door and play a little, and maybe they'd give me something to eat."

While he was speaking the brown eyes had come out of the grass, and presently a little girl, a head shorter than the boy, stood at the other end of the stile, looking sharply at him.

"You are the raggedest boy I ever saw," she said, suddenly, even before the boy knew she was there.

"And I may add, the hungriest," quickly replied the boy, turning his blue eyes on her. "What sort of a daisy are you, anyhow?"

"Better leave before Black Tom sets the dogs on you," suggested the girl, with a significant look at the house.

"How many are there of 'em?" anxiously inquired the boy.

"Five; and they are all good ones."

"And who's Black Tom?"

"Why, he's Black Tom; that's all."

"And would he set all them big dogs on as hungry a boy as I am?" asked the little musician.

"Are you a hungry boy?" and the brown eyes opened wide.

"Well, I should say so. I haven't had enough to eat lately to keep me out of mischief."

The girl laughed.

"You won't steal anything if I take you up to the house, will you?" she asked, looking a little doubtful.

"Not a thing."

"Nor talk mean to anybody?"

"No; I'm too hungry for that."

"Then I'll take you along with me and give you some cold victuals," said the girl. "But first you must play for me."

"I'll do that quick enough," and the boy began to play a lively air, more rollicking and gay than any the girl had ever heard before.

She looked on wonderingly and said nothing until the music ceased, when her brown eyes sparkled and she laughed.

"I call that jolly. A boy that can't play the fiddle don't amount to much in my opinion."

This was the first compliment the lad had received in a long while, and it elevated him in his own estimation wonderfully.

In fact, he forgot all about the "cold victuals," and played tune after tune, every one of which was listened to with manifestations of great delight by the little girl.

"You called me the raggedest boy in the world, a while ago," presently he said, as he turned the strings of the violin to his breast; "'twas awful mean in you!"

"But you are ragged," insisted the girl, "and the Lord only knows who you are and what your name is. All that you are good for is to play the fiddle."

"Who are you, anyhow, that talks so big?" said the boy sharply.

"Me? why, I am one of the Templetons."

"And the Templetons—"

"Are rich people, and live in that big white house over there, with lots of servants handy, and an iron fence, and five savage dogs in the back-yard, and plenty of cold victuals for beggars."

"You are some, and that's a fact!" said the boy, touching the rim of his ragged hat. "Which of the Templetons are you?"

"I'm Gipsy."

"Gipsy Templeton. I don't call that bad; in fact, I rather like it, for it sounds like my sort o' people—people who live in the streets. How old are you, little rat?"

"I'm ten years old; and I'm no little rat, either, and don't you call me that again or I'll have Black Tom set the dogs on you, for all you play so well. Is there such a thing as a big nasty boy like you having a name?"

Involuntarily the lad tried to conceal the numerous apertures in his garments; then, conscious of a terrible inferiority, he replied:

"My name is Jack—there's nothing hitched to it; jes' Jack. I'm all alone—me an' my violin."

"And haven't you any place to go when you're tired and hungry?" asked the girl, the brown eyes opening wide.

"No, not here," answered the boy. "When I'm in the city, there's an old whisky barrel that I sleep in o' nights; it's on the wharf near a pile o' lumber, and the 'cops' don't know anything about it. I go there when I'm tired; I'm allers hungry."

The little musician was evidently a young character from the city, who knew very little about the ways of country life.

In fact, this was his first experience—if such it may be called—outside of a large city or town, he having been brought up to play the violin in the streets and earn money thereby. His whole life, so far back as he could remember, had been that of a street musician.

True, he would occasionally have visions of something beyond his present life, a sort of disclosure that he had not always been so miserable, a faint

remembrance of loving faces and kind voices, so unlike what he was accustomed to now; but these reflections would be but momentary, and then the wretchedness of his life as a strolling street musician would be the more apparent.

"Yes, I'm pretty much all alone," went on the boy, "and I haven't got many friends, that's a fact. You see, I've run away from home."

"What; the whisky barrel?"

"No; I didn't live there all the time. I had a boss, and a bad one he was. I couldn't stand to be thrashed and kicked around so much, so I left. There were other boys with him, and three of us ran away."

"What was the man's name?" asked Gipsy, always a little curious.

"Fernando Columbus," replied Jack.

"Yes; I've heard of him before," said the little girl.

"I guess not," said Jack.

"Well, I have."

"Where?"

"In my geography."

"Oh, well, that's another Columbus; he's the chap that discovered America, I believe. Well, my Columbus ain't no relation of his. My Columbus is the meanest man you ever knew; he's thrashed me more times than I've got fingers and toes. Let me tell you how he looks. He is a little man, with an awful long nose, and blind of one eye; and then he is very dark, black hair, and swarthy face. He's a frightful looking man, I think."

"And you lived with him until just a little while ago?" said Gipsy.

"Yes; and then me and two other fellers skipped out."

"And who told you to come here?" questioned the girl.

"Nobody; we strayed this way kind o' naturally. Two of us played the fiddle, and the other boy, the harp, and we made things lively, I tell you. I was the boss, 'cause I was the oldest. But I had bad luck with my troupe. The boy with the fiddle and the boy with the harp both got killed."

"You don't say so."

"Yes, but I do though. The little fiddler got mashed flat as a board. It was at a circus, and the little chap got too near the elephant, and the beast stepped on him."

"And the other boy?"

"He's dead too. Oh! I had awful luck. It wasn't for the fiddler that I cared so much, but the boy with the harp; I couldn't spare him, but he went off and got killed, all the same; fell into a beer vat, and was drowned. This happened the same day the other boy was killed, and somehow it made me feel kind o' nervous for myself, and then everybody looked at me so. I was known, I was spotted, and that night when I went to the circus, the clown said, as a sort of a joke, you know, pointing at me: 'It's your turn next;' and then there was a big laugh, and I sneaked out and took to the fields, and have been going ever since, and here I am."

There was a short silence, then Gipsy, seizing the boy by the arm, looked up in his face and said:

"You've had lots of trouble, and I wonder that you are alive. Come, let's go to the house and I'll give you all the cold things you can eat, and then you can play for me and tell me some more big yarns. I think, as Uncle Ned says, you can lie 'as fast as a horse can trot.'"

The boy was about to make some tart reply, when there was a shout from some one across the field, and the next moment a number of horses, hotly pursued by a tall negro man, dashed into the field, and whirling and capering about, finally took a straight shoot for the stile on which our two young friends were standing. The African did not follow them, but seemed satisfied, and returned to the house.

"I'd give anything for a ride," spoke up the little musician, as the horses came swiftly on. "I never

was on a horse's back in my life. It must be a lot of fun. Are they tame?"

"Yes," replied Gipsy. "You may ride the spotted pony if you wish to. Let me hold your violin while you catch him. His name is Crimble."

Gipsy laughed softly to herself as the boy slyly approached the apparently docile creature, for she knew that, with all his quiet ways, Crimble was the most vicious nag on the place. Nearly every negro on the plantation had tried to ride him, but he invariably managed to shake them off, and go on his way with his heels in the air.

"Climb right on," said Gipsy, as Jack took the pony by the mane.

This was more than Jack could do from the ground, so he led the horse to the stile, and after a little rough diplomacy, succeeded in getting on him.

"I am here," he said, looking at Gipsy and laughing; but there was no certainty of his being anywhere in about a minute, for a second later, away went the horse, mane flying, heels in the air, first one way, then another, a mad clattering of hoofs, and the next moment the boy went off head foremost and was buried in the tall grass.

Clapping her hands, Gipsy ran toward him.

"Jack, Jack!" she shouted, bending over him.

But Jack did not answer; he did not hear her; he lay on his back with his eyes closed. She caught hold of his arm and tried to pull him to his feet, but he fell back and groaned. Then, frightened almost out of her senses, the little girl started back, screamed, and, turning, fled swiftly away.

CHAPTER II.

JACK FINDS HIMSELF CORNERED.

"DARE'S something wrong wid dem hosses, I knows," remarked Black Tom, a tall negro, with a very white head. "I 'clude dey's had too much fodder lately an' not 'nuff work. I say, you, Aunt Jane, whar am yer?"

"Yas, I hyr ye," and a woolly head, partly covered by a red handkerchief, appeared at the window. "What fo' yo' stan' dare gapin' like a big fool niggah? Don't yo' see dare's trouble in de meadow? I'd jes' like ter break ebbry bone in yer body."

The old darky walked away grumbling. Everything appeared all right in the field, and he did not see the use of walking half a mile or so for nothing. Nevertheless he went the full length of the path and was returning, still talking to himself, when he heard a groan which sounded only a few steps away.

"De rim ob de shadow," exclaimed the African, poetically and mysteriously. "I 'clude at once dat somebody hab been murdered."

Jack still lay on his back when the negro found him, and though no blood was visible on the leaves or grass, and no marks of any kind to show that he was injured, still he was unconscious.

It required only three or four lusty shouts from Black Tom to bring a crowd of people to the spot, and among those who were attracted thus, was Mr. John Templeton, sole proprietor of the plantation. He was a fine looking man of about forty years of age—a strange man in some respects, but very pleasant withal. He was a widower, and Gipsy was his only child. He owned a small plantation, with a few negroes, and not being of a very active temperament, took the world easy, living principally among his books. As for Gipsy, he bothered himself very little about her, only saw that all her wants were supplied, that she did not fall into dire trouble, and, most of all, that she did not intrude herself on him when he was busy.

"The boy seems to be injured," he said, bending over the prostrate form. "Who knows anything about him?"

Black Tom came forward and began to tell his story, but as he did not appear to know any more about the case than his master, the latter stopped him with the remark:

"What a simple old fool you are, Tom. I'll warrant you've been fast asleep all the morning. Stand aside and give Aunt Jane a chance to tell what she knows about it."

A stout old wench with a shiny face and a red turban on her head, elbowed her way through the crowd, and began to speak.

"I knows all 'bout it," she said, with a contemptuous look at her black companions. "I'se de on'y brack pussun on de plantation what's ob any earthly consequence. I sees de boy when all de res' war' sleep, an' he war jes agwyne like de wind on de spotted hoss. I reckon he was tryin' to run 'way wid dat pony mighty bad."

"That will do," interrupted Mr. Templeton, who had heard enough to satisfy him that the boy was one of a gang of horse-thieves, who were just then prowling about the country. "Tried to get off with one of my best horses, did he? By my soul, I think we've caught a precious bird. I have half a mind to let him die where he is. It wouldn't be exactly right, though, but, anyway, I'll make an example of him, and a good one too, when he recovers."

An hour later, when Jack returned to consciousness, he found himself on a rude bed in a low room, with a tall man dressed in black, bending over him.

"The whisky barrel has changed somewhat since I've been gone," he muttered, looking around the room in a dazed sort of way; "and then again there's something queer about the place. I wonder what's the matter, anyhow."

"Don't 'sturb yerself, chile," said old Aunt Jane, who was at his side in an instant. "You'll know whar ye am arter 'while, sure nuff. 'Pears like dese hoss-thieves nebber tumble so as ter butt out dere brains. Now ef it had been a nice young man what fell from de hoss he'd 'a' been killed, suh. But dis fellah 'll get well, an' keep on stealin', I reckon, jes' though nuffin had happen'd. Don't you t'ink dat's 'bout so, Massa John?"

She turned her black eyes on the master of the house, who still stood with arms folded looking at the little sufferer.

"It is a good deal as you say, Aunt Jane," he remarked, slowly; "these horse-thieves and other miscreants seem to escape accident almost miraculously. This one is only slightly injured, however. It's too bad—"

"Jes' what I say, Massa John," interrupted the old woman; "it's too bad dey don't kill demselves on de spot."

"I didn't say that, Jane, you vicious wench!" exclaimed John Templeton, angrily. "I say it's too bad these people can't be reformed. Now, this boy looks bright enough, but no doubt he's as full of wickedness as he can hold. I've been very easy with these miscreants, but if I don't make an example of this one then I deserve to lose every horse on the place."

He said this, and turning, left the room. He had been gone about a minute when Aunt Jane began:

"It beats de ol' dickens what dese young chaps will do. I say, boy!"

"Well, old woman?"

"Don't you call me ole woman, ye good-fo'-nuffin rascal."

"Never strike a feller when he is down," said the boy, coolly; "that's what I've allers been taught."

"You's a mis'able little rascal, dat's what you am!" spluttered the negress. "Jes' tolle me yer name, yo' little sinner."

"Find out what it is, if you can," said Jack, trying to sit up in bed. "I don't feel very bright just now. What is the meaning of all this?"

"It means dat you's gwine ter jail for boss-stealin'," replied the old woman. "Jes' you wait."

"That's about all I can do now, old lady," growled Jack, turning over in bed. "Oh, what a tumble I had!"

"Why didn't ve stick on de hoss, den, an' git away?"

"I wasn't trying to get away. All I wanted was a ride."

"An' you got it."

"Yes, and a cracked head too. I wish I had never seen this place. Where is that confounded little girl that made such a fool of me?"

The old negro woman started.

"Yo' don't mean Gipsy, do ye?"

"Yes, Gipsy."

"Well, yo' don't want to say any cuss-wo'ds 'bout Gipsy, fo' she's de angel ob de house. What yo' know 'bout de leetle gal?"

"Nothing, only that she played me an awful bad trick."

"Jes' 'splain."

In a few words Jack told the old negress how he had been induced to ride the spotted pony, and the consequent result thereof. And he added, speaking of Gipsy:

"I don't think much of her, though she is awful pretty and nice like, but she played me such a bad trick. Why ain't she around here somewhere, I'd like to know?"

The door of the cabin opened at this moment, and Mr. Templeton came into the room. Jack did not know the man, of course, but suspected that he was the master of the place and Gipsy's father. He spoke at once:

"I guess I've given you some trouble," he said, "I am very sorry."

"You have reason to be, you young rascal. Are you much hurt?"

"I've got an awful head on me," replied Jack; "it feels as big as two heads, just about. I'm all right every other way. I wasn't going to steal your horse, sir—I truly wasn't."

"I don't know about that," and Mr. Templeton looked somewhat unbelieving.

Jack thought the better plan would be to explain matters at once, so he began to tell Mr. Templeton all that had happened—how he had encountered Gipsy at the stile, how he had played for her, and finally how, by her consent and encouragement, he had mounted the spotted pony and received the fall that took away his senses for the time being and placed him in the hands of those who now held him a prisoner.

"Just like my Gipsy," said Mr. Templeton to himself as Jack concluded; "she is forever getting herself or somebody else into trouble. Perhaps I had best be a little more strict with her. I am really at a loss to know what to do with her."

"It bothers me more to know what you are going to do with me," spoke up Jack, who had overheard the last remark.

At this moment Black Tom came into the room, holding in his hand what seemed to be a battered and broken violin.

"Dis tells de hul story," he said, swinging the broken instrument on high. "Dis am all dat am lef' ob a one't noble instrument ob harmony."

"A violin," said Mr. Templeton.

"One ob de hosses hab stepped on it," remarked Aunt Jane.

"Mashed all to splinters," said the old white-haired negro.

There was a horrified look in Jack's face as he saw the condition of his violin, and he stretched out his hands to grasp it.

"Give it to me!" he cried.

Black Tom did so.

With staring eyes Jack surveyed the broken instrument, then he sunk down on the bed with a groan.

Mr. Templeton's heart was touched. He knew that this instrument was the boy's only capital, that he earned his bread by its use.

"Never mind, Jack," he said. "I'll replace it for you."

"Will you?" and Jack started up, his eyes brightening.

"Yes: only tell me what has become of Gipsy. I

have a notion she has got herself into other trouble somewhere. I really can't keep track of her. Where is she now, I wonder?"

"I can't tell you," said Jack.

There was little doubt at first that Gipsy would soon come around all right, but as the hours flew by and she came not, Mr. Templeton became uneasy, and at length thoroughly alarmed.

"We must find her," he said; "she may have been injured by one of those vicious horses."

"Whar shall we look?" asked Black Tom, starting for the door.

"The meadow first, and then the woods," replied Mr. Templeton.

As many as eight persons in all began the search, which lasted until long after mid-day, when all returned, reporting that no trace of the little girl could be found.

Then all was excitement. From mouth to mouth it went that Gipsy was lost. Hurried preparations were made, horses were saddled, guns brought out, and, for a while, all was bustle and confusion. Every able-bodied person in the place was ready to join in the search.

"Ye ain't a-goin' to let this thieving young rascal jine in with us, are ye?" said the overseer of the plantation, a villainous-looking man by the name of Allen.

He had reference to Jack, at whom he turned his wicked eyes in more than one sinister scowl.

Bill Allen was known to be one of the meanest men in that part of the State. He was brutal in his nature, corrupt in principle, and utterly devoid of anything like humanity and gentlemanly instincts. Those who were under his authority hated him, and all such feared him as well.

"Ye don't know anythin' about this lad," he continued, turning to Mr. Templeton; "and I'll wager my hat ag'in' a gooseberry that he's a thief. Ef I had my way about it I'd give him fifty lashes at once. Depend upon it he's a bad one."

The words of the overseer put some strange thoughts into the head of Mr. Templeton. Perhaps this boy was a thief; perhaps he was even now planning some scheme, in conjunction with other rogues, to rob the house that very night. There was no telling what might be in the mind of the boy. And then perhaps he knew more about Gipsy's absence than he wished to tell.

"I know something about these roving Italians," he said, half to himself, and half aloud; "and they are a hard set. What if this boy is one of a large gang of these people and Gipsy has been stolen!"

The thought made Mr. Templeton shudder. He began to look upon Jack as a suspicious character.

"Better chuck him in the stone jug over thar until we find the little one," suggested the overseer. "'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,' you know, and if this little rascal gets out of sight once, that's the last we'd see of him. Just turn him over to me; I'll fix him. I say, boy."

Jack was looking rather pale; he had a large bandage around his head, and he limped considerably. He had just stepped out the door of the cabin when Bill Allen accosted him:

"What do you want?" he asked, not very pleasantly.

"I want to speak to you," said Allen.

"Well, drive along; I sha'n't object."

"Sha'n't you, though? Wal, then, what is yer name?"

"Jack," replied the boy, dryly.

"Yes, I know; but who's Jack?"

"Why, Jack's me."

"Confound you, I didn't ask for that. Who are you, I say?"

"Jack, only Jack—that's all of it."

The overseer grew livid with rage, and cursed and stormed terribly. Shaking his fist into the boy's face, he yelled:

"I have a notion to skin you alive with this whip. How dare you to talk so to me? Answer me—who

are you, an' what are you doin' here? What is your name?"

"I'm Jack," coolly said the boy; "I'm only a rovin' fiddler, but that's no reason why you should talk to me like a dog."

This was more than the impulsive overseer could stand; he made a spring at Jack, and, seizing him by the shoulder, brought his heavy whip down on the poor boy's face and head several times. Then, still whipping him, and swearing at every stroke of the whip, the burly brute dragged the poor boy to the "stone jug," a low building used as a plantation jail, and thrust him in.

"I reckon you'll stay thar awhile," he growled, as he closed and locked the heavy door. "If I had my way about it, I'd cut you into mince-meat before sundown."

Jack felt that he was into cruel hands now, and also that he was a prisoner without any apparent hope of escape.

"If I only had my fiddle with me," he muttered, "I wouldn't feel so bad about it; but as it is, I'm just the most miserable boy in the world."

CHAPTER III.

JACK FINDS HIMSELF IN DIRE TROUBLE.

Once alone in the jail, Jack felt that he was indeed a prisoner; to be free once more he would have given anything he possessed. There came over him such a homesick feeling, as he looked around the bare, dirty room, that he fairly groaned in his wretchedness.

"I wish I had never left the city," he muttered, half-inclined to give way to tears; then he braced himself up and continued, "I don't care though, for I'm getting a mighty lot of experience."

He seated himself on the floor, and began to think; he thought of all that had happened, of the wild, roving life he was leading, and of the future, which, indeed, looked gloomy enough, and the more he thought of these things the more disconsolate he became over his present position.

Meanwhile, Mr. Templeton was urging a vigorous search for the little girl, Gipsy. All that afternoon the able-bodied members of the plantation were scouring the adjacent woods and fields in search of the missing girl. And all that night the search continued; guns were fired, bells were rung, and even the dogs of the plantation joined in the search.

"Gipsy, Gipsy, where are you?" This was the father's pathetic cry all that night long.

But the little girl came not; neither did she hear the tumult that was being made in her behalf.

For a full week longer the search for Gipsy was continued. Messages were sent in every direction, and every possible effort to find her was made. At the end of a week news came from a distant point on the river that the remains of a child had been found floating in the stream. Could it be Gipsy? The body was beyond recognition, it was so badly decomposed, but Mr. Templeton thought it might be the remains of his little girl, and the neighbors thought so too, and so the search was discontinued, and the stricken father returned to his books.

Not so Bill Allen, the overseer; he was not through with Jack, as the latter discovered through the ceaseless talk of Aunt Jane who visited him daily to bring him food and water.

"Dey'll whip you tu def, jes' as true as yo' name am Jack," was the constant remark of the old negress.

One night Jack lay awake until near morning, thinking what to do.

He knew that he was friendless, and almost helpless, and he believed that the wicked overseer, Bill Allen, had something dreadful in store for him.

"I must get out of this," he finally said, "even if I have to knock somebody over to do it. I think I can dig a trench under the wall, if they'll give me time enough to do it."

The thought was a good one, and if carried out, he might escape.

He began work at once by tearing a board up from the floor.

Then he cut the board into strips and flattened the ends as best he could, and commenced digging.

He was a strong, active boy, and he made the dirt fly, and piled it up on either side in great piles.

All day long he worked, and by evening the trench was under the wall and another hour's labor would bring it to the surface on the other side.

Aunt Jane brought him his supper and kindly informed him that he would be publicly whipped the next day at noon.

"I'd rather be whipped now," said Jack.

"Jes' yo' wait," returned the old woman; "dere'll be heaps ob fun when de whippin' begins; an' it's gwyne ter come. So the boss, Massa Allen say, anyhow."

Somehow, Jack did not take the old wench's words to heart so greatly as she thought he would, and she returned to the cabin crestfallen.

One, two, three hours passed.

Jack could not tell the time of night, but he thought it must be after midnight, for all noise had ceased about the plantation.

He crawled into the trench and began to work.

He scooped up the dirt and used his hands to throw it out.

Once in a while he would stop and listen; some one might be near, he thought, and discover his plot to escape.

Only a thin wall of earth was between him and liberty now.

He worked vigorously, and finally felt the cool air against his face, and knew that a few strokes more would complete the work.

A moment he waited and listened; he could hear nothing; everything was still; then he quietly crept out.

Very much like a squirrel coming out of the ground, Jack popped out of the trench, head, body and feet.

He thought no one saw him, but some one did; it was Black Tom.

He had been to a religious meeting at a distant cabin, and was just passing the jail when he heard sounds as of some one digging in the earth.

He stopped and listened, and his head began to sink down into his high collar, his hands went into the air, his eyes bulged out, as he saw a small form creep out from under the wall, and the next moment he knew nothing; for he was suddenly knocked head-over-heels to the ground.

"I thought it was a post," exclaimed Jack, scooting away like mad, "but I guess it was a nigger."

He soon knew who and what it was, however, for Black Tom began to yell at the top of his voice, and in a very short time the whole plantation was aroused.

Once into the meadow Jack knew which way to go to reach the woods. He had no time to contemplate his situation, but dashed along, and soon the black, jungle-like forest closed around him.

"They are after me, a big lot o' fellers," he said, as a chorus of shouts came to him from the plantation buildings.

Filled with a terrible dread, and yet thankful to be free, Jack plunged into the depths of the forest. He did not stop to listen or look around him, but hurried along as fast as his feet would carry him, going deeper and deeper into the tangle of trees and brush and vines, until he thought he was surely beyond discovery by his pursuers.

"They'll never find me here," he said, as he ceased running and began to walk, but still panting from his long run; "but I'll make sure of it, and go deeper into the tangle."

He stopped short in his tracks, for at that moment there came to his ears a sharp cry like that of a child in distress. It was quite a distance away at first, but seemed to get nearer at every cry, and Jack thought surely it was the little girl Gipsy.

"If it is Gipsey," he said, "how happy I shall be.

I will take care of her and return her to her father at once. I know he would not harm me then."

He started off in the direction of the cry, thinking he would soon have the little girl under his protection, but before he had gone a great distance, he heard the cry again, this time only a few steps away, and so sharp and thrilling that he stopped in his tracks, frightened and almost speechless.

It was surely not the cry of a child, he thought, but rather of a wild beast, which might tear him to pieces the moment he encountered it; and yet again it might be a child, and that child Gipsy.

Another sharp cry, from the tangle of trees and vines, satisfied Jack that some beast of prey was approaching him; and frightened at the thought, he turned and fled as fast as he could go.

And it was well that he did; for presently there sprung onto the branches of the tree near which he was standing a panther, than which there is no forest inhabitant more to be dreaded.

Jack did not know how near to death he had come, but to some extent he realized his danger, and it was more than an hour before he stopped running.

Then the light began to break in the east, and he knew it was near morning; and for the first time since he broke jail he felt hungry and tired.

It grew light slowly, and as the sun came up, Jack began to feel the effects of his long run. His limbs almost refused to support his body, and he experienced such a sense of fatigue that he could scarcely drag himself along.

The situation was anything but pleasant. Still Jack did not lose heart. He hurried along, always hoping for the best.

Finally, about noon, he found himself in a low, marshy place, in which grew at least an acre of raspberry bushes bending with their luscious fruit.

To Jack, hungry as he was, these rich, ripe berries looked wonderfully tempting; and as he devoured them, handful after handful, he thought he had never tasted anything half so good in all his life.

After satisfying his hunger he continued his journey, but dread and uncertainty were still with him.

All the rest of that day he kept moving, until at length the shadows began to fall, and he could fairly feel the darkness coming down. Then came a new surprise.

Through the dark foliage of the trees faintly glimmered a light from what seemed to be a cabin, or other habitation, a little way off.

It was surely this and nothing more, thought Jack, and he cautiously approached it.

The cabin was a very rude affair, and stood on the edge of a small clearing, which was inclosed by a rail-fence very much tumble-down.

The cabin was of logs, and had a stone chimney with the top partly demolished.

Jack had some hesitancy in approaching the place, and the more so when he saw a large dog emerge from a wood-pile near the door.

The dog began to growl and bark savagely, and then the door flew open and a man stepped out, and with his hand on the dog's head, ejaculated:

"What's the trouble, Nero? I don't see anythin' to growl 'bout. Hadn't yo' better shet up an' come inter the house?"

The dog continued to bark and growl, and the man went on talking.

"Who's prowlin' 'round yer?" he said. "I'd like ter catch any one prowlin' 'round my cabin, I would. I say, fellah."

Jack thought it about time to speak, though he would have given anything he had in the world to have been miles away from there at that moment. But he put on a brave face, and walked boldly forward.

"Don't be surprised," he said, "it is only yours truly, that is all."

"But who the dickens is 'yours truly'?" said the man. "I don't know sich a fellah in this neck o' timber. I reckon you've got some other name than 'yours truly'."

"Well, yes; my name is Jack."

"Jist Jack?"

"That's all; only Jack."

The man emptied his mouth of a large quantity of tobacco juice, and, thus relieved, continued:

"I don't know ye—never see'd ye afore, What ye doin' yer?"

"Traveling."

"Fer yer health?"

"No, not exactly. I'm going somewhere."

"Whar?"

"I don't know."

The man eyed the boy sharply, and the latter made use of the short silence to note the appearance of his new acquaintance.

He was certainly not a very interesting-looking individual; he was, in fact, quite the contrary. He was a tall, lean, lank, cadaverous specimen of humanity, with gray eyes and yellow beard, big hands and feet, and a mean expression about his nose and mouth.

Jack did not like the looks of him at all, but he kept his thoughts to himself, and broke the silence by saying:

"I've lost my way, and I haven't the least idea where I am. Can you tell me?"

"Yas, I kin," was the gruff reply, "but we'll talk 'bout that arter a while. Jist now we'll tend to other business. Hev ye been travelin' long?"

"One night and a day," replied Jack.

"Then ye must hev started somewhere near the Templeton plantation?"

This was said interrogatively, and with a touch of sarcasm, Jack thought. At any rate, it sent the cold chills all over him.

"Yas, I see," said the man, noticing Jack's discomfiture. "We'll talk it over in the house."

He opened the door of the cabin and they went in.

CHAPTER IV.

A SERIES OF THRILLING ADVENTURES.

JACK did not know who the man was, whether he be friend or foe; but he trusted to luck, hoping everything would come out all right.

There was nothing in the house to speak of in the way of furniture, but Jack noticed several small children rolling about the floor and a weak-eyed woman in one corner of the room, all looking dejected and about half-starved.

"Quite a family," the boy ventured to remark, hoping the man would take it as a compliment.

"Wal, yas," was the reply.

"Have you lived here long?"

"Wal, yas, quite long."

At this point he again emptied his capacious mouth of an accumulation of tobacco juice, and turned his small gray eyes on Jack sharply.

"I think I've seen you before," said the boy, determined to keep up a show of good feeling.

"I reckon not," returned the man. "Born yer, allers lived yer."

He rose to snuff the candle, and Jack took this opportunity of surveying him closely. He was indeed a mean-looking man, and, next to Bill Allen, the overseer, the meanest-looking man Jack had ever seen.

"Wal," he said, resuming his seat, "now I want ter bring things to a p'int. It don't look right that ye should be prowlin' 'round yer, an' I want ye ter tell me what ye'r' doin'."

"I'm harming nobody," said Jack.

"Perhaps that's true, young fellah," said the backwoodsman. "But ye don't kin yer fer nussin. Ye say yer name is Jack, but what does that amount to? what do I care fer yer name? Let's hev a bit of yer history. Whar was yer brought up?"

"In the city," said Jack.

"What city?"

"New York."

"Pears like I've heerd of that place afore. War ye born thar?"

"I don't know," replied Jack: "I sometimes think

I was, and then again I think I wasn't. I can't remember."

"Don't know whar ye 'us born!"

"That's what I said."

"Hain't ye any father?"

"I don't know."

"Nor mother!"

"I can't remember of any. I tell you, all I know about myself is that I once lived in New York, where I played the fiddle for a living; then I run away, and kept on running until I got here. I'm not harming anybody, and I think you'd better let me go."

With this he started for the door, but quick as a cat the man sprung on him, and, with a savage growl, thrust him back in his seat.

"I wasn't nigh done with ye," he sneered, "an' ef ye try to git away ag'in I may hurt ye. Ef Bill war only here, I'd turn ye over to him, an' I reckon he'd fix ye."

Who did the man mean by "Bill?" Jack did not know, but his suspicions were aroused at once.

"I've hearn of ye afore, I think," said the man. "I b'lieve yo' told me as how yo' jes' come from the plantation of the Templetons?"

Jack felt like sinking through the floor. His silence betrayed his thoughts. The man continued:

"I thought I spotted ye right, an' now I know it. It ain't often that Chris Allen makes a mistake."

Chris Allen!

The name sounded familiar to Jack, and it was associated with a train of unpleasant thoughts.

"You're thinkin' of Bill Allen," spoke up the man seeming to read the boy's thoughts.

"That's the name," said Jack, aloud. "Bill Allen! Do you know him?"

"Yas; relative of mine."

"How near?"

"Brother."

Jack was astonished.

"He jist left here 'bout an hour ago," continued the man, "an' he told me all 'bout ye; said to look out fer ye, perhaps you'd come this way. Bill wasn't far off when he said that. He's a good one."

He took a fresh chew of his favorite weed, and then resumed:

"Bill said as how the Templetons would give five hundred dollars for you, dead or alive. He said it would suit the old man best to capture ye alive, but as fer himself, Bill, he would rather capture ye dead. So, ye see, I git five hundred dollars fer this job. Pretty good, ain't it?"

Jack made no reply; he was not feeling very happy at that moment. He knew that his chances of escape from this man were very small, and more than once he wished that he had allowed the panther in the woods to devour him rather than to have fallen into the hands of a human panther like Chris Allen.

"Well, I suppose there is no help for it," he muttered, and then to Allen: "When do you start with me?"

"To-morrer."

"And what are you going to do with me to-night?"

"Let you stay whar ye are. I'll look arter ye."

And he took down from the wall a long, double-barrel shot-gun.

"How is this?" he asked with a broad grin. "Hev ye any sort o' notion to git away?"

"I might try it," said Jack.

"Then I'd shoot ye dead. It's all the same to me, you know; dead or alive, I git five hundred dollars. I kin take ye thar dead, perhaps, better than alive. But it don't make the slightest difference to me which way. So be kerful."

Jack did not hesitate to acknowledge to himself that he was in a bad box. It was plain also that Chris Allen was no great improvement on his brother, the overseer.

There were two rooms in the cabin, and one of these rooms the children, some half dozen in number, and the weak-eyed woman, appropriated, and Jack and his uncouth guard were left alone.

"You may tumble inter that bunk near the wall," said the man, pointing to a low, tumble-down affair that was used as a bed. "I'll stay yer an' see that ye don't git away."

Jack was very tired, and, although the bed did not look very inviting, he got into it, and was soon sleeping soundly.

Not once during the night did he wake, and when, in the gray of the early dawn, he opened his eyes, there was the man, gun in hand, just as he had left him, still keeping his tireless watch.

"Well," said Jack, looking up.

"Jes' so," grunted Allen. "I reckon ye feel better now?"

"In one way I do," said Jack.

"Yas?"

"I'm not so tired."

The man laughed.

"Ye hoosed it all the way over, I s'pose?" he said; "ye kin ride back in my chariot."

"Your what?"

"Chariot."

"You're very kind, but I'd rather walk back, I believe. Can't ye trust me to go back alone?"

Chris Allen did not reply to this, but said to his wife, who was sleeping in the next room:

"I say, you Nancy, git up."

"Directly," called the woman.

"Rush together a little grub," explained the father and husband, "an' don't ye be all day 'bout it either."

"Yas, old man," came from the depths of the inner room.

Having given his orders and received-a satisfactory rejoinder, Chris Allen opened the door of the cabin, and he and Jack went out.

Near the house was a stable, and in the stable a horse, or rather the skeleton of one, for it looked more like a pile of bones to Jack than anything else.

The boy could not help laughing.

"What yer laffin' at?" roared the proprietor of the skeleton.

"Such an elegant horse," said Jack, still laughing.

"Are you preparing him for a show?"

"Prepare, did you say? Not much. He is already prepared. I don't want no better hoss than this one. Look at his legs."

"Yes, I see them."

"He can pull; he's stout."

He placed his gun within easy reach and began to throw on the harness.

The latter consisted of ropes and chains, and was altogether a complicated piece of workmanship.

And then the chariot!

It was a vehicle of odds and ends, fearfully and wonderfully made.

"Lord bless us!" exclaimed Jack.

"What's ther matter now?"

"Such a carriage!"

"It's a good 'un. I say, young fellah, seein' as how you're my prisoner, an' I'm ter git five hundred dollars fer ye dead or alive, ain't ye slingin' on a good deal o' style?"

Jack said he thought not.

At this moment the door of the cabin opened and breakfast was announced by the weak-eyed woman, who added:

"An' I don't want yer to be all day 'bout comin', either."

Allen and Jack started for the house at once. On the way Jack saw something which escaped the eyes of his not very watchful guard.

A white-haired youngster, of some five or six summers, was playing in some shavings and loose hay near one corner of the cabin, and he had made quite a pile of this fuel and had set it on fire.

Jack's first impulse was to call Allen's attention to it, but a moment's reflection decided him not to interfere with the child's pleasure.

The youngster went on with his fire, and Jack, followed by the backwoodsmen, went into the cabin.

A breakfast of corn-dodgers and bear-meat awaited them.

"They'll feed ye better up at the Templetons," remarked Chris Allen.

"I don't know about that," said Jack.

The youngster on the outside had got his plaything well under way, and the same seemed to please him very much, for he was very noisy with laughter.

"I hear a roarin'!" suddenly exclaimed Allen "What is it?"

"Just the trees," said Jack.

"I don't know about that; I reckon thar's a fire somewhar'."

At this moment the white-haired youth bolted into the house and yelled:

"Daddy, come out yer quick. I've got things jist a-roarin'!"

There was a general rush from the cabin at once, and, seeing what was the matter, all began to howl and yell in chorus. Even Jack tuned his voice with the rest, and to all appearances was as anxious as any of them to put out the fire.

One whole side of the cabin was on fire, and the flames were sweeping over the roof, and would probably soon envelop the entire building.

Jack seemed to be working vigorously to stay the progress of the fire, but really he was watching an opportunity to slip away from Allen unobserved and get into the woods.

Presently the opportunity occurred. Jack was a quarter of a mile away before his absence was discovered. He had not lost time in the flight, but made every moment count. At a rate of speed of which he had hardly thought himself capable, he sped through the woods.

On, on he went from tree to tree, down into thick jungles of vines and bushes, over wooded hills and through tangles of briars and brush, never stopping, never halting, but always going on.

Even the long-legged Allen, who soon gave chase, could not overtake him, and he returned to his smoldering cabin, swearing vengeance on all mankind.

It was late in the afternoon when Jack made his first halt.

"I don't know whether I'm safe or not," he said; "I rather think I'm alone anyway."

He began to study what to do next.

One thing, he was hungry.

Some boys are always hungry, and Jack was one of this kind. It was constitutional with him, he thought.

It was all the same, at any rate; he was hungry, and the wherewithal to appease his appetite was not apparent.

But it would not do to remain idle; he must travel many miles that day if he would secure himself from capture by those who were searching for him.

So he went on hurriedly.

At last, just as day was drawing to a close, he met a little negro boy walking along a by-path in the woods.

At first the boy was frightened; he began to cry, but Jack assured him he had no need of fear, and the little fellow dried his tears at once.

"You see, I'm too hungry to pick up a row with you or anybody else, jist now," he said. "Where do you live?"

The boy ran his eyes along the path.

"All right," said Jack; "if you'll lead the way, I'll foller you. I want to have a talk with your boss."

The boy comprehended what was wanted of him, and started off, Jack following.

Pretty soon an open space was reached in the woods, then came a fence, and then a low cabin.

In the doorway stood a fat old wench, black as a coal, and near at hand was an ancient looking darky chopping wood.

Both looked up at Jack's approach, and the old negro, leaning on his ax, said:

"Lord bress my soul, but I'se de wus' s'prised nigh in de worl'."

Jack marched up to them boldly; he had the spirit of a highwayman now; he was growing desperate.

"If there's anything to eat in your cabin, trot it out," he said; and he spoke fiercely.

"Bress us!" exclaimed the wench, throwing up her hands. "Hab ye cum to murder us? We ain't done nuffin. Me an' my old man am all alone yer, an' we nebber do nuffin to nobody. Jes' take all dar am in de house, but don't murder us."

Jack did not stand on ceremony, but went into the house at once and helped himself.

When he came out he had under his arm a loaf of corn-bread and a large piece of meat.

"You won't miss this," he said to the shivering Africans. "I need it more than you do."

"Take it all—take de hull outfit—tote off de cabin, ef yo' want ter, but spare our dear lives!" wailed the old woman, as Jack stopped before her, with a chunk of corn-bread in his mouth.

The boy felt in his pocket for some money. He had saved up a few dollars, the part receipts of his various roving musical concerts of a few weeks back, and the same would no doubt come handy now. He gave the old couple a silver dime, with the remark:

"I'll pay you for what I've got. I wouldn't steal anything for the world." And then, looking at the gathering gloom: "It's growing late, and I must hurry along."

And he plunged into the woods.

CHAPTER V.

JACK FINDS A COMPANION.

It seemed as if the boy never grew weary. But he did.

Half the time he felt like sinking to the ground and never making another effort to live.

Still he kept moving on, and no word of complaint escaped him.

He walked until midnight, then he crept into a hollow tree that lay prone across his pathway and slept until morning. It was a sound sleep and dreamless. Jack was very tired.

In the morning he was ready for a fresh start, and on he went until finally he found himself in an open country, where there were a few scattered houses and fields, with orchards, and here and there a large meadow, like the one in which he had encountered Gipsy Templeton.

Poor Gipsy!

Jack wondered what had become of her; and somehow he thought he should sometime see her again.

"It wasn't her body they found in the stream," he said; "Gipsy is alive to-day."

He did not know this to be so; he only guessed at it; but future developments will show that he was pretty good at guessing.

He took a well-traveled road that bordered the wood and continued his lonesome walk.

Pretty soon there was a cluster of houses like a town or village, and a little further on a large building that Jack took for a prison.

But it wasn't a prison: it was a school for boys, for there in the yard were as many as thirty boys of various ages, all trying to amuse themselves in some way.

Jack eyed them sharply, and passed on.

Finally, a little further down the road, he came in sight of a group of boys, five in number, who were quarreling and fighting.

One of the group, a lad of about the size of Jack, held a violin in his hand, while the other boys were trying forcibly to relieve him of it.

There was a good deal of yelling and swearing, and the boy with the violin clung to his instrument tightly, while the others hammered him about the head and face in a brutal manner.

This was more than Jack could quietly bear. He would fight for any boy with a violin, so with all the

impulsiveness of his daring nature, he sprung forward and mingled himself with the fight.

He was a stout boy and able to give hard blows, and he dealt them out lively for a while, and the battle was soon at an end.

"I'll teach you a lesson, you cowards," he yelled, shaking his fist at the retreating boys. "I'd be ashamed, five of ye, to pitch on to one feller."

There were many challenges for a renewal of the combat, but finally peace was restored, and Jack and his new-found friend were left alone.

"We'd like to have 'em tackle us again," said the strange boy, defiantly.

"They'd better not try it," responded Jack.

"We licked 'em, too, didn't we?" said the stranger, with charming freedom.

"Bet your life we did," replied Jack.

"They were too many for me alone," went on the boy. "I ain't much of a knocker."

"I thought you struck well," said Jack. "I wouldn't ha' interfered but for that fiddle."

"No?"

"Yes. I s'pose you can play it?"

"A little. I'll show you how much."

He ran the bow across the strings a time or two, and then handed the instrument to Jack.

"I know you can make a go of it," he said. "Try it."

Jack needed very little persuasion; the moment his hand touched the bow he experienced a thrill from his head to his feet.

Though he had learned to play in the streets, Jack was no inferior musician, and now that he was in a humor for playing, he fairly made the fiddle dance.

"You're a stunner," said the strange boy.

"I'm all of that," answered Jack, accepting the compliment.

"I think I never saw a fiddle jump so in all my life," continued the boy. "Where did you learn to play?"

"In the streets."

"Who are you?"

"I'm Jack."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing."

"Where is your fiddle?"

"Bu'sted."

There was a searching look in the eyes of the strange boy as he asked the next question.

"Ain't you the boy that's been raising such a racket over at old Templeton's?"

This was an unexpected question.

Jack's eyes fell, his lips quivered, and his face turned pale.

"Needn't be 'fraid of me," said the boy. "I'd rather die than turn ag'in' ye. Ain't you the boy?"

"I can't see that I've done anything wrong," replied Jack.

"I don't know what you call it then," replied the boy. "They say you stole the little girl Gipsy, and cut up other capers; and if they catch you—well, I'd hate to be in your shoes."

"And they're after me, are they?" said Jack.

"I should say they were."

"And you—"

"Well, I'll not betray ye. Why, I'm running away myself."

The boy's black eyes looked sharp into Jack's face as he said this, and then, as if satisfied that he was telling his secrets to a friend, he continued:

"I'll tell you who I am, and all I say is true. To begin with, I'm a mighty bad boy. I'm a wicked boy. I know it, and so does everybody else. I can't help it. It's been knocked into me. I don't seem to get along very well with any one. Since I was born, everybody has picked at me, and thumped me around, until I'm just about as bad as it's safe to be, and live. As for my name, well, my name is Andrew."

"Then I'll call you Andy," said Jack, "for short. But Andy what?"

"Andy Richards."

"All right. Go on with your story."

"I know you, and you know me now," said Andy, "that is, all but what you don't. Did you pass a big building a little way back?"

"Yes, some sort of a school."

"Exactly. There's where I live, or rather, where I did live. I've run away now. I'm a bad 'un."

"Oh, ho!"

"You needn't laugh."

"It's only a little queer," said Jack, "for I'm running away too."

"It's a serious matter with me," put in Andy. "If I should be caught, they'd cut me into fine strips."

"So bad as that!"

"Bet your life. It's a Reform School I'm running away from. You have heard of 'em?"

"Haven't I, though!" said Jack. "Rest easy on that point. I have. By gracious, I believe you are a bad 'un."

"Don't make any mistake about that," said the boy. "I'm the hardest kind of a cat-fish. It's only the tough nuts that get into such places. It was not a matter of choice with me, I can tell you."

"No, I s'pose not."

"You see, my folks are all dead long ago, all but a miserly old uncle, and he trumped up a big story and sent me there. There was some little property left me, but I'll never see any of it. I'm bad enough, I know, but it's only on account of bad treatment. I tell you, I've had a rough time of it ever since I can remember. I've often thought I'd like mighty well to get a little kind treatment, just to experience the sensation. But now all I ask is to be let alone."

"And you play the violin," said Jack, "which is another crime."

"Yes, so people seem to think. I don't play it very well, though, but I am learning fast. You must be an old hand at it."

The two boys walked along together, and Jack told Andy all about himself, even from the time when he was a little street rat playing from house to house.

"There ain't much of the Italian about you," said Andy, glancing at Jack's long, bright hair, and noting his blue eyes and fair complexion. "I've seen lots of Italians, and they're all dark."

It was indeed a strange fact. There was nothing in Jack's appearance that indicated Italian blood. But if he was not of that race, why did he not know it, and why was he brought up among them?

Looking at Jack and Andy, there was a striking contrast.

They were about the same age, size and weight, but there the likeness ended.

Jack was light, even to his eyes, and his disposition was mercurial.

On the contrary, Andy was dark; eyes, hair, complexion, and he was rather of a despondent nature.

"I think we are pretty well matched," remarked Andy, "and as we are both 'runaways,' suppose we travel together. One thing certain, I'll never go back."

"If we had another violin," sighed Jack, "or a harp."

"A harp is what we want," said Andy. "What will one cost?"

Jack smiled feebly.

He had very little money himself, and he had no reason to suppose Andy had any.

"Nobody'll trust us," he finally said.

"Don't want 'em to. What do you think of this?"

He thrust his hand into a capacious side-pocket, and finally brought out a roll of bills.

"How much for the harp?" he asked.

"Eighteen dollars," Jack replied.

He began to count the bills.

"You don't know me," he said. "I am a Rothchild."

"Lots of wealth," said Jack.

The roll of bills amounted in all to the insignificant sum of eight dollars.

Andy looked forlorn.

"I've got two dollars," said Jack, "and ten dollars will buy a small harp, or a second-hand one. Let's travel."

They quickened their steps, and both were in very good spirits, talking and laughing, as they walked along.

And so the day passed, and that night the boys slept under a hedge.

In the morning they went on, and breakfasted at a farm-house in sumptuous style, all for a little music.

"They oftener set the dog on a feller," remarked Jack, by way of explanation.

The boys went on.

Finally they reached a city of considerable size, and after long search found a harp, which they purchased for ten dollars.

Jack had learned to play the harp years before, so he gave instructions to Andy to play the violin, and with a little practice the two were able to play exceedingly well.

Fearful lest they should be recognized by some one, the boys hurriedly left the city, and took a course that led into a section of the country not so thickly settled.

The first week they traveled day and night, sleeping in the woods, and in deserted cabins, and under hedges, and picking up a little food at farm-houses on the way. Finally, when they were certain they had eluded pursuit, they rested a few days, Gipsy-like, in the woods that bordered a small settlement.

Here they played a good deal, not for money altogether, but for practice.

"It's discipline we need," said Jack, with the air of a professor. "Practice makes perfect, I've heard it said."

It was a wild life they were leading, but Jack knew no other, and as for Andy, he liked it, for it just suited his restless, roving disposition. They went from town to town, sometimes stopping a day or a week, then off to other places, always playing for small sums of money, or for food and shelter.

They had followed this life about six weeks, when one evening they came to a river, or large stream, that took a serpentine course among the hills. It was a dashing sort of a stream, and the ground that bordered it was like a strip of meadow dotted with large trees.

The boys were surprised at seeing so large and swift a stream, and they were more surprised still when they heard the sweet strains of a violin, accompanied by a harp, coming from the opposite shore.

"A band of Gipsies," exclaimed Jack, on the impulse of the moment.

"Where are they?" asked Andy.

"Look."

The light from the setting sun covered the trees and grass with a crimson glory, and in its brightness the camp of the strollers could be distinctly seen.

A bright fire was burning, and around this were several persons, while nearer the river were two boys with harp and violin, and still nearer the stream, a little girl. Only the outlines of the latter could be seen plainly, but that it was the figure of a little girl Jack and Andy knew well.

The boys were both very much excited at once.

"Let us join them," said Andy.

"How shall we cross the stream?" said Jack.

This was a puzzler.

It was deep and swift.

In his excitement, Andy took off his hat and waved it at the Gipsies.

"Halloo!" he cried.

At once the music ceased, and a voice from the other side cried out, sharply:

"Who are you?"

With his harp in his hand, Jack mounted the rock that leaned out over the water.

"I'm Jack, the fiddler," he shouted, in a loud voice.

The Boy Tramps.

11

A derisive laugh came from the opposite shore.

"Yes, I'm Jack, the fiddler," yelled the boy, "and there's nothing else to it. Or, if you like, you may call me Jack Templeton!"

Hardly had he uttered these words, when the little girl, whom they had seen standing near the river, threw up her hands, and leaning forward, in a childish voice, quivering through fear, cried out:

"Jack, Jack! Save me! Save me!"

Her arms were outstretched, and she seemed as if ready to fly across the stream.

Who was it?

Jack's brain was in a whirl.

It was Gipsy Templeton!

CHAPTER VI.

THE BOYS MEET WITH ADVENTURE.

JACK thought it was Gipsy, still he did not know. It was like the little girl's voice, very much like it, and then she called him Jack!

"Gipsy, Gipsy!" he cried.

Before the child could answer, before she could say a word, she was seized by brawny hands, and three seconds later the whole band, the little girl included, disappeared among the shadows.

In the gathering gloom the boys stood with eyes staring over the water.

"Gone," said Jack.

"Gone," repeated Andy.

It seemed hardly real.

"Was it the little lost Gipsy?" questioned Jack.

"More than I can tell," answered Andy.

"There is only one thing that I know about it," said Jack, "and that is—she is gone!"

"So are all the rest, for that matter," returned Andy. "Now, what shall we do? Let us follow them?"

"But the river?" suggested Jack.

"There must be a bridge somewhere."

They started off down the stream. The first mile, no bridge; the second the same as the first; and then darkness settled over valley, wood and stream, and they could scarcely see to move.

"It's no use, Jack; let's go to roost," suggested Andy.

They found a hedge that seemed to offer very good protection, and under this they passed the night.

"Jack," said Andy, the next morning, "do you think Gipsy Templeton is alive?"

"Yes, I do," was the reply.

"But her folks don't."

"No; they think she was drowned. I know better; she was stolen."

All that day the boys were on the look-out for the band of strollers they had seen the night before.

But they had gone, nobody knew whither, and left no trace behind.

For several days following the boys traveled southward, halting very seldom for any length of time, when one night they came to quite a large negro settlement in an immense forest.

The colored people were holding meeting, and they were having a big time. Some were shouting, others praying, some dancing, some singing, while not a few, as Jack thought, were trying to stand on their heads.

It was a laughable sight, and standing unobserved in the background, the boys enjoyed it hugely.

One old darky, who appeared to preside over the meeting, was fairly doubling himself up with the fervor of his exhortations.

The boys watched the proceedings a short time, and then Jack said, mischievously:

"Let's get up behind the old chap and scare him."

"Agreed!" said Andy.

The boys slipped up within a few paces of the gesticulating parson, and secreted themselves in a clump of elder-bushes, and there quietly watched proceedings.

The darky preacher became very much excited, and imparted his fervor to the audience; and the result was manifested in a perfect medley of sobs, groans, shouts and hysterical cries from a majority of those present.

About this time, when the excitement was the highest, it occurred to Jack that he too would enter into the spirit of the meeting; so he gave his harp a few thrums, and Andy, taking the cue, made a noise on his violin most diabolical.

The exhorter paused with his hands in the air, the audience became still at once, and the eyes of all stuck out like saucers.

The silence was only momentary. The sable preacher, although frightened half out of his wits, still kept the stand, and in a voice deep and melodramatic cried:

"I tol' yo' so, chil'ren, I tol' yo' so; an' now yo' heah fo' yo'self de mighty prophet howlin' in de wilderness! Pray! all ob yo' pray! fo' he's comin' to jedge de worl'!"

The boys gave another terrible blast on their instruments, at which the assembled negroes, together with their patriarchal chief, took fright and scampered away in every direction.

The men abandoned their coats and hats, the women their bonnets and shawls, and Jack and Andy were left the exclusive possessors of the rough board platform and seats which accommodated the preacher and his audience.

"We scattered 'em," said Andy, feeling very jolly over the matter.

"And they may come back and scatter us," remarked Jack, doubtfully. "Perhaps we had better play a little, so as to kind of quiet their wrath if any of them should return."

The boys struck up a merry tune, and played it through without stopping. Then they began another rollicking piece, which had the effect of bringing two or three woolly heads into view, and before they had half finished it the platform was weighted down with at least half the congregation of the negro preacher, and with the preacher himself.

"Let's hab a hoe-down," suggested the latter, who, all the while Jack and Andy were playing, had hard work to keep his feet from joining in with the inmusic.

"Jes' what I se thinkin' ob," returned a colored belle, smiling bountifully all over her face.

The preacher could stand it no longer; so, seizing the sable beauty around the waist, he whirled off into a dance so wild and grotesque that the little musicians could not help laughing.

This was the signal for others to join in the dance, and pretty soon the whole company were energetically employed the same way.

And they kept it up as long as Jack and Andy would play for them, and it was after midnight when the fun ceased.

An hour later the boys found themselves once more alone. The negroes had supplied them bountifully with the coarse food of their cabins, and all they could wish for now was a place to sleep. This they found shortly after leaving their African friends, in the shape of an empty building, where they lay down and slept soundly until morning.

So the days passed.

Jack was happy and gay, and Andy was the same, for they were liberally and kindly treated wherever they went.

So the summer passed into golden autumn, and the leaves begun to fall, and occasionally there were winds from the north, cold and bleak.

"We haven't laid up anything for a rainy day," remarked Jack to his companion one afternoon. "I haven't a penny left."

"Neither have I," replied Andy.

"S'pose we should meet with a misfortune of some kind," remarked Jack, "a big misfortune?"

"What do you mean, Jack?"

"Bu'st one o' the fiddle strings, for instance." Andy laughed.

"That wouldn't be such a terrible calamity, would it?" he asked.

"No, but it might interfere with our prospects of getting a living this winter. You see, the weather is changing, and we can't sleep out of doors much longer."

"Let's trail southward, Jack," suddenly spoke up Andy.

"We've been working that way all the time," returned Jack.

"Yes, I know; but we are a good distance yet from where cold weather never comes. Now, if we can find a place where people don't need any clothing and nothing to eat, and everybody is lazy, that's the place for us. Do you know of such a country, Jack?"

The latter was silent a moment. He was thinking. He had read of just such a country as Andy was asking for.

"Have you heard of Texas, Andy?" at length he said.

"Texas."

"Yes."

"I should say so. I had an uncle go there a few years ago, and he never came back; the inhabitants killed him before he had been in the State a week."

"What had he done?"

"Nothing; they wanted pistol practice, so they said, and as he was a stranger they just put him up for a target and shot him full of holes. He never recovered. He was killed dead."

"It must be a free-and-easy country," laughed Jack.

"It is, for a fact. Shall we go there? What do you say?"

"Let's drift that way, anyhow."

The boys journeyed on.

They went from one district to another, meeting with little adventures here and there, but with good nature and a free use of harp and violin, they managed to keep out of serious trouble.

Once they stayed all night in an empty barn that stood some little distance from a large white house. They had been given permission to stay there by the master of the premises, who also gave them some blankets upon which to sleep.

"I call this mighty fine," said Jack, as he got between the blankets.

"I do, too," returned Andy, "and what's more, I'm going to sleep right away."

The boys were soon asleep, but for some reason or other, Jack was wakeful, and at about three o'clock in the morning was startled by voices that appeared to come from some place in the barn.

He started up and listened intently.

Then he awakened Andy.

"Don't say a word," he whispered; "we are not alone. I hear voices in the barn. Listen."

It was even so. There were others in the barn besides themselves.

The voices were rough and harsh, with many coarse expressions and much profanity.

"Who are they," whispered Andy.

"Where are they, rather?" returned Jack.

The boys left their couch and crept quietly along the floor until they could see the door-way, whence they thought the voices came.

"There they are," whispered Jack. "Look."

The moon streamed in at the open door, and there, on a low bench, under the full light of the moon, were the strangers.

They were rough-looking men, and Jack, more than Andy, closely noted their every feature.

"I'll know both of these chaps if I ever see them again," whispered Jack to himself. "They are mighty hard customers, I think."

"What are they talking about, I wonder," said Andy.

"I don't know. Listen."

One of the men rose to his feet, and looking at his companion, said:

"It's a clever trick and there is money enough in

it to pay for all the danger. In other words, it's a fat thing. What do you think of five thousand dollars for the job?"

"Too small, too small; better say ten thousand dollars. The old man is worth piles of money, you know, and he'll stand ten thousand like a book. What say you?"

"It suits me; but are you sure we are not deceived?"

"Sure, mighty sure. I've talked with the girl, and she is as sharp as a whip. She told me all about herself. Oh, she's a good one."

"And her name you say—"

"Is Gipsy Templeton!"

As this name was pronounced Jack and Andy both started. What could have aroused their suspicions more than this? Who were these men, and what had Gipsy Templeton to do with them?"

"I got my eyes on the little rat yesterday for the first time," said the man with the scowling face, "and I knew her at once. Dead! Her dad was an old fool to think so. She was stolen by a roving band of Gipsies."

"And you saw her yesterday?" questioned the other man.

"I certainly did."

"Did you ask her many questions?"

"Yes, a good many. I had to watch out, though, and talk with her on the sly, for the Gipsies guard her very closely. I hadn't got half through talking with her when I was told to leave, and as the command was backed with a long knife I slid out at once, and left the girl crying after me."

There was a break in the conversation of a second or two, then one of the men said:

"The scheme is to steal her away from the Gipsies and hold her for ransom. It won't take long to bring matters to a focus. We'll first notify the old man that the girl is in our possession, and then ask for a reward, and name the amount."

"But what if he don't give it?"

"But he will, though; he'll do that or lose his girl. There is no doubt that he will come to time. It don't matter if we have to keep her a year."

"A capital scheme. But how about the Gipsies?"

"Oh, we'll wade into them. If they will give her up without trouble, so much the better; if not, we'll leave a little cold lead with them and gallop off with the gal. I am not particular one way or the other."

Very little more was said by the plotting villains in the hearing of Jack and Andy. The latter were dumfounded, and scarcely knew what to say or do.

Five minutes later the bold, would-be kidnappers stepped out into the moonlight, mounted their horses and rode away.

CHAPTER VII.

LIFE AMONG THE GIPSIES.

NEITHER of the boys knew what to do, whether to follow the rascals at once, or remain in the barn until morning and then try to find the Gipsy camp, whither they knew the men were going.

"I think we had better stay here; I am awful tired," said Andy. "I don't really know that we can do anything for the little girl, anyhow. She'd be about as well off, I suppose, with these men as with the Gipsies; only if we could steal her ourselves—"

The thought caused the boy to hesitate. concluded the remark.

"You are right," he said; "we might steal her ourselves, and then if we could return her to her folks, what a big thing it would be for us."

"And for the girl, too," put in Andy.

"Yes, certainly."

"Let's not wait a moment."

They seized their instruments and started off as fast as they could go.

It was not probable that the boys should know the whereabouts of the Gipsy camp. It was all guess-work with them with the single exception

that they knew it lay to the south of them, for that is the direction the plotters took.

They went on rapidly, and said but little to one another; they went from field to field, over hill-tops and stretches of tangled woods, all the while thinking of the little homeless waif Gipsy.

At length just as the sun was coming up, they came to a wooded ravine, and halting a moment on the edge, were surprised to see two horsemen ride out of the bushes a little way off and move at a slow pace down the ravine.

The boys recognized them at once.

"The two villains," exclaimed Andy, pointing at them with his violin.

"Hush," said Jack. "We must not let them see us."

The men turned a bend in the bushes and were at once lost to view.

Half an hour passed, then, just as Jack and Andy were about to leave the ravine for more elevated ground, they heard a loud yell a few yards away, followed by a sharp pistol report, and immediately after there came out of the bushes at their left the two horsemen, one of them holding in his arms a little girl, none other than Gipsy Templeton.

Boldly Jack threw himself in the way of the horsemen.

"Halt!" he yelled, raising his harp as a sort of shield.

With a furious yell the man riding in advance urged his horse along. His aim was to ride over Jack and trample him into the ground, if necessary, and this he almost succeeded in doing. The boy was knocked down by the onset of the plunging horse, and before he could regain his feet, the two villains were many rods away, and riding like the wind.

Andy thought Jack was killed.

Almost ready to cry, he rushed to him, but before he could speak Jack looked up, dazed and bewildered.

"Are you hurt, Jack?" asked Andy.

"No, I guess not. I thought I was a goner at first, though. It was a close shave."

The ground was tramped all around him, but the hoof of the maddened horses had missed him, though the harp at his side was crushed to pieces.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried Andy.

"Glad o' what?" growled Jack; "that my harp is bu'sted?"

"No; that you didn't get killed."

"Oh, I'm all right," assured Jack; "but look at this music-box."

There was not much left of it, for a fact, and the loss was indeed a serious one to the boys.

The latter were pretty certain now that the Gipsy camp was not far away. They knew this from the fact that the men had not been gone long when they returned with the little girl, and also from the fact that they could hear even then a wrangling and shouting that seemed to come from around the bend in the bushes less than a hundred yards away.

"There's an awful howlin' over there," said Andy; "it is in the Gipsy camp. Suppose we go and interview them?"

The boys started at once, though not without some misgivings as to how the black-eyed rovers would receive them.

"If they undertake to harm me in any way, I'll run," remarked Andy, who had a good idea of preservation.

"And leave me to take care of myself, I suppose," said Jack; "that would be a bright idea."

"But I have a notion that you'll run, too," replied Andy.

"And there you are right. We'll stick together in that, sure."

They entered the Gipsy camp very quietly, and were greeted with a battery of dark eyes and by many scowls and harsh words spoken in undertone.

The Gipsy band numbered in all eight persons.

The leader, or chief, was an old man of weird appearance, with form much bent, keen black eyes, a tangled mass of gray black hair, and a knot'y look, like a tree that had been stunted in its growth.

The others of the band were an old woman of fifty, wrinkled and brown, two girls of twelve and sixteen, a swarthy-looking boy of eighteen, and three men of uncertain age.

"Who are these boys?" demanded the old Gipsy king, casting suspicious glances at the young friends.

This was spoken in Italian, a language that Jack understood perfectly.

"Whence come they?" he continued, as the boys continued to approach.

The keen-eyed old hag gave them a sharp, defiant look.

"Look out for them!" she warned. "Nobody knows who they are—young thieves, I suspect. I'll get some hot water ready and we'll scald them. Who'll care what becomes of them? They're nobody's boys, and nobody'll claim them after they're dead."

The boys were well aware of this latter fact. They knew that they were relying upon themselves entirely, that they had nobody to look to in case of emergency—that, in fact, they were, as the old Gipsy witch had said, nobody's boys.

"Whence came they?" again asked the Gipsy king.

"From the woods," was the reply of one of the men.

"They are spies," growled the hag. "Why not take their lives at once?"

The Gipsy leader motioned a short, thick set man, low-browed and villainous, to come forward.

"You see those boys," he said.

"Yes."

"Have you a stout rope?"

"Hum. I think so."

"Then you know what to do with it. But wait, I will speak to them."

Jack stepped forward unsolicited.

"A strange way you have of treating your friends," he said, in the Italian tongue.

The man looked surprised.

Jack's bright face and sunny hair made him wonder and think.

"You are not an Italian?" he asked.

"I am indeed," replied Jack.

"Where are you from?"

"New York."

The leader gave a swift glance at Andy.

"Brothers?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Friends and road-mates."

The old man's black eyes fairly pierced the boy through and through.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"Nowhere."

"Where have you been?"

"Nowhere."

"What have you been doing?"

"Nothing."

Another searching glance, and the Gipsy king turned to one of the male members of the band, who had come forward with a violin in his hand, and said, pointing to Jack:

"He calls himself an Italian."

"It is a lie; he is not of our blood," exclaimed the Gipsy. "Look at his eyes and hair."

Jack's blue eyes flashed.

"I don't know what I am," he retorted, in the Italian tongue. "I was brought up as an Italian, and have always lived with that people, so far back as I can remember. But, one thing I do know: I can play the violin with the best of you. Just let show you."

An instrument was given him immediately.

Jack was a splendid player, and now, animated by

the thought that he must please the Gipsies, the young musician tramp surprised even Andy by his skill.

The Gipsies were delighted; they clapped their hands and gave forth several hearty cheers.

"If I only had a harp," now declared Jack, "both of us would try it."

A harp was brought out at once.

Andy took the violin, and Jack the harp, and the boys played one of their liveliest airs.

This worked a wonderful change in their favor. The Gipsies no longer looked upon them as spies, but on the contrary were outspoken in their delight at having secured so valuable an acquisition to their band. They thought, of course, Jack and Andy would be glad to join them, and they were not mistaken; nothing could have suited the boys better. They agreed to become members of the order at once.

Jack thought at first some ceremony or oath would be necessary before Andy and himself would be allowed to travel with the Gipsy band, but such was not the case. It was evident, however, that full membership was not given them at once; they could see that a strict watch was kept over them, a fact that was anything but agreeable.

There was nothing remarkable about the personal appearance of the Gipsies, or about their mode of living, except in the case of the Gipsy king, who was a queer old man, and wore a weird appearance, and that of the old woman, who was also very queer, and was so wrinkled and brown that she looked hardly human. The old man answered to the name of King Victor, while his mate went under the savage cognomen of Mad Ellen.

The company were well supplied with all the plain necessities of life, and all they possessed in the way of goods, such as blankets, cooking utensils, etc., were conveyed from place to place in a large covered wagon, drawn by two sorry-looking horses, while another horse, used exclusively for the saddle, was usually to be found at the rear of the wagon. This was the outfit of the Gipsies when Jack and Andy joined them. Possibly the boys might discover other things before long.

"What do you think of 'em anyhow?" asked Jack, when he and Andy found themselves alone.

"They are a queer set," replied Andy, "but I think we shall have lots of fun traveling this way. I like the old man."

"You do!"

"Yes, he's such an odd old coon. I suppose whatever he says is law. Is that not the way of it?"

"I don't know. Perhaps the old woman is the boss. At any rate she does the fortune-telling business, and that's more important than anything else. But isn't she an old witch in appearance?"

Andy thought she was, and fully expressed himself on this point, much to Jack's merriment.

"A fine name she has, too. Think of it. Mad Ellen! And the old feller calls himself King Victor!"

The boys chatted on for some while, when, presently, Jack reminded his companion of the abduction of Gipsy Templeton from the camp of the strollers, and added:

"I don't know that we can do anything for the little girl, although I should like to, mighty well. It wouldn't be safe for us to go back to the Templeton plantation; they would not believe us if we should tell them all about Gipsy; they might put us in jail, for all I know. And as for those men, we could do nothing with them. In fact, about all we are able to do at present is to take care of ourselves."

The boys did not wish to be seen talking in whispers and alone, so they mingled with the Gipsies, who were by this time preparing the morning meal.

"Pump the old man about Gipsy," suggested Andy; "and I'll see what sort of an impression I can make on the old woman."

Jack took the hint, and approaching the Gipsy king, began to ask questions about Gipsy, all of which were answered in a sullen and suspicious manner.

He learned that the men who had stolen her from the Gipsies had been hanging around the camp for some days, that they had taken advantage of the careless watch of her constant attendant, one of the Gipsy girls, and carried her off by main force; that a pistol-shot had been sent after them by the old king himself, and, finally, that the little girl had given them a good deal of trouble and they were glad to be rid of her.

While Jack was holding converse with the Gipsy king, Andy was trying to make himself agreeable to Mad Ellen. He did not succeed very well in this. His inability to speak any other language than English, was a serious drawback to friendly intercourse with the old hag.

It was not long after this that breakfast was announced, and a queer meal it was. A white blanket was spread on the ground, and over this were scattered promiscuous heaps of hard biscuit, corn bread and meat, with tin plates in abundance, and three or four wooden bowls and gourds.

Jack and Andy were invited to partake of the food, which they did with great relish. Following this, they played a little on harp and violin for the amusement of the Gipsies, and then, the sun being well up in the sky, preparations were made at once to leave the place and journey southward, a direction in which the company were moving when the boys came upon them.

"Do you know where we are going?" asked Andy, as the train moved off.

"Not exactly," replied Jack; "but I'll ask the Gipsy king. He will tell me."

He put the question to the old man.

"To the land of flowers," was the reply; "where the birds sing and the roses bloom the year round. There we can live in the open air and be happy always."

The prospect was a delightful one, and the boys lived for the time being in a fever of expectation.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BOYS MEET WITH NUMEROUS SURPRISES.

"It isn't so pleasant as I thought it would be," said Jack, after he and Andy had been with the Gipsies several weeks.

"Too much stealin'?" suggested Andy.

"Yes; and then I'm suspicious all the while that they'll get us into trouble. It's a hard life. Do you know anything 'bout g'ography, Andy?"

"Yes, a little."

"Well, then, try to figure out just where we are. I'd like to know what State we are in, at least."

"The state of misery, anyway," declared Andy, laughing.

"I agree with you there, Andy, but there is another kind of State. Are we in Kentucky or Texas?"

"Kentucky," replied Andy. "I think we are not far from the Mississippi River. We'll have to cross that stream after a while, if we go to Texas."

At the next town, Jack procured for himself a map which gave the different cities, towns, rivers and streams which they would be likely to encounter on their way.

"I don't intend to be a fool on these subjects," he said. "I'd like to know what I learned to read for if it wasn't to post myself on all such matters. Now I'll know just where we are going and how to get there."

As a usual thing the party kept clear of large places, and made it a point to halt on the outskirts of small villages, where the superstitiously inclined would come and have their fortunes told, and pay handsomely for the same.

Jack and Andy were much interested in these proceedings; they had very little confidence in the ability of Mad Ellen to foretell the future for any one, and more than once they were obliged to turn aside to keep from laughing outright at the credulity of some of her patrons.

"It's a shame to swindle people in that way," remarked Jack to Andy, one day after they had wit-

nessed one of the old hag's fortune-telling impositions. "Why, she don't know any more about telling fortunes than I do."

"But she thinks she does," said Andy, "and so do her customers; and as for swindling anybody, as long as those who employ her think they get their money's worth, where is the difference?"

"But right is right," continued Jack, "and it isn't right to cheat people out of their money, that's certain. But, Andy, don't you think it about time we had reached that big river you told me about the other day?"

"The Mississippi!"

"Yes."

Even as they spoke a broad sheet of water came into view, and presently it was apparent to all that the Father of Waters, the rapid-flowing Mississippi, lay before them.

It was a new experience to our young friends; they had never seen this noted river before, and as they watched it on its way to the ocean, they could not help wondering at its wonderful strength and power.

The Gipsy king seemed to be perfectly familiar with the river in all its windings; he knew every foot of ground over which they were traveling, and he was never in doubt which way to go or how to overcome the usual obstacles of travel.

"Do we cross the river here?" asked Andy of the old man.

"A little further down," was the reply. "There used to be a ferry there years ago; perhaps it is there now, or perhaps it is gone. It doesn't matter: we shall manage to cross somehow."

King Victor was not mistaken. The puffing of the ferry-boat was heard presently, and it was not long before the wagon, and all else comprising the Gipsy party, were rapidly being conveyed across the river.

"We are in Missouri now," said Jack, as he effected a landing. "I am keeping watch of the route pretty sharp; for if we should want to come back sometime—"

"I'm mighty certain we wouldn't come back this way," interrupted Andy.

"How then?"

"By water. It's a much shorter way than over these rocks and hills. Jack, do you know that I've got an idea?"

"About what, Andy?"

"Why, I suspicion something. This old man is not leading us around this way for nothing. He has some reason for avoiding the traveled highways, and I wouldn't wonder if he had committed a crime somewhere and is running away from justice. It looks that way, anyhow. Do you know which way he intends to go from here?"

"Yes, I had a long talk with the old chap, and as I speak Italian, he talks very freely to me. He traced out the route we are to take on this map. I conclude we are to go right through the State of Arkansas and reach Texas by the Indian Territory. It's a long jaunt."

The Gipsies wasted very little time on their travels now; they seemed to be in great haste to reach the mountains of Arkansas, where, as the Gipsy king explained, they would find a much more hospitable people than in the cold, dreary North.

The next three weeks were therefore spent in constant travel, and when a halt for a few days was finally made it was in the State of Arkansas, not far from the Missouri line and within a hundred miles of the Indian Territory.

It was a country of rocks and hills, with here and there a field of corn, or of cotton, and every fifty miles or so, a village of some kind, consisting of a few stores and dwellings.

It was near one of these small towns that the Gipsy band halted for a few days, in hopes to pick up a few dollars by fortune-telling and in other ways. Of course Jack and Andy were not expected to be idle; by playing the harp and violin they would be able to contribute more than a few dollars

to the general fund. The latter was in the keeping of King Victor, who kept a strict account of every penny that came and went.

It did not take the people of the little town long to discover who and what their visitors were. They came in by twos and threes, and sometimes a dozen at a time, some out of curiosity and others to have the past and future of their lives revealed.

The Gipsies made money here, and would have stayed longer had they not been frightened away by the singular behavior of a native youth, who came thundering into camp one night and demanded the services of the fortune-teller then and there.

He was a rough specimen of the mountains, and to Jack and Andy, who looked upon him curiously, he seemed to be all spurs and hat. The former he shook savagely, and pushing the rim of the latter back from his face, demanded immediate attention.

"It's too late," said old King Victor. "You should have come sooner."

"Late, is it?" yelled the youth. "What do I care how late it is? Don't fool 'bout it, but trot out the old gal that does the business."

"Not to-night," said King Victor.

"What's that ye say?" roared the stranger. "I don't want to ax ye no mo'. Jes' trot her out."

The Gipsy king expostulated with the rustic, but to no avail. He'd have his fortune told or have blood.

"I don't care if she's a thousand years old!" he said. "She must do ther business for me to-night. Do you see this?"

He whipped out an ugly-looking revolver and shook it at the Gipsy king.

"Shoot!" he yelled. "I reckon so. Look down the muzzle of this popper and count the bullets. I mean business, I do, so trot out the old 'oman."

The countryman evidently meant what he said. He was in dead earnest.

Mad Ellen reluctantly came forward.

"Ye want yer fortune told, do ye?" she growled.

"Bet yo' life I do," replied the youth. "I didn't kin ten miles fo' nothin'."

"Who are ye?" angrily asked the witch.

"No, you don't, old 'oman. I don't tell you anything. You may be smart, an' all that, but when ye git ahead o' the Badger family you'll be doin' a heap sight more than I think ye kin. Joe Badger ain't nobody's fool, neither is his gal Miranda, who lives with her brother, over on the Ridge. Oh, no! ye can't git anything out o' me. Here, ef ye want to gaze on my paw, here it is fer ye."

He held out a heavy black hand, which the Gipsy looked at very closely, muttering to herself mysteriously the while. Finally, she spoke aloud:

"Your age, young man," she said, making a pretty good guess at it, "is not far from twenty-three."

"Hit it to the center!" interrupted the man. "I am just that age, three years older than Miranda. What else do ye know about me?"

"You live about ten miles from here on a place called the Ridge," went on the old woman, and there also lives your sweetheart, Miranda. Am I not right?"

"Yes, yes. Go on."

"She lives with her brother; her parents are dead, and she is a very lovely young lady."

"Ye can't speak that too loud, old 'oman," cried the irrepressible Badger. "Miranda is a right smart gal, and when it comes to rail-splittin', she's thar' every time. But I am 'fraid it's all up with me thar'."

"Why?"

"That's what I'm axing you. You see, the gal can't have two fellers at once; it won't do."

The Gipsy witch went on.

"Miranda is only twenty years old, and although so young, she is remarkably bright. She thinks a good deal of you, sir; but there is another young man who is trying to capture her heart, a mean rascal, a scoundrel of the worst kind, a villain!"

"Yes, blast me ef that ain't so." bundered the now

thoroughly excited lover. "I'm going to lay fer him some of these days, an' then word will go out that a certain feller has passed in his cheeks mighty suddint, and nobody'll know who plugged him. He's a mean scoundrel, and all he wants of Miranda is the forty acres of land that her old dad left her when he died. I see it all now, and it makes me mad."

The Gipsy witch had no difficulty in telling this man's fortune, for he gave her every chance in the world to guess the points most desired.

The fellow remained in camp at least an hour, and left only when thoroughly satisfied that all the leading facts, of both past and present, concerning his own life, and that of his girl, Miranda, had been brought to light.

"You have done me a big service, old 'oman," he said, as he rose to go. "Here is a twenty dollar gold piece; take it; it is yours."

He pressed it into her hand, mounted his horse and rode away.

The Gipsies, including Jack and Andy, quickly surrounded the old woman to look at the precious coin.

"Gold, gold, gold," she said, with the light of the fire shiring on the precious metal.

King Victor took it in his hand and looked at it with scowling eyes; then, with an oath, he cast it aside, and said:

"Good for nothing. You have been cheated, old woman; cheated. The coin is bad."

The old hag fairly raved; she cursed the day she was born; she grow lived with rage as she spoke of the man who had cheated her thus, and declared that she would sometime have revenge.

Finally she was quieted, but it was not until the night was half gone that she was induced to seek repose.

The next morning there came into camp two men, officers of the law, searching for one Joe Badger.

"He killed a man a few nights ago," explained one of the officers, "and we are after him. He is a dangerous fellow. He is accused of dealing in counterfeit money, and then he kills people once in a while for amusement like. Anyway, it looks that way."

It was not long before it became known among the people that a noted desperado had been seen in the Gipsy camp, and for fear that this might result in trouble to the rovers the Gipsy king decided to leave the place at once.

That noon the Gipsies started on their way southward.

Jack and Andy now thought of leaving the band and make their way back to Kentucky.

But they did not like to do this for several reasons.

"They might trump up some charge against me and put me in jail," said Jack.

"And as for me," remarked Andy, "they might do the same with me, or even worse. Guess we had better stay where we are."

"But it seems too bad about Gipsy," said Jack.

"Yes, but it is out of our power to do anything for her. All we could do would be to tell her father of what we saw and heard, and he may know as much as that already. The rovers may have returned her by this time. You know that was the scheme."

"Yes."

"Then, I say, let's stick to the Gipsies a while longer."

The boys could do no better than this, so they said no more about leaving, and time wore on.

They were now in the mountainous portion of Northern Arkansas, much of which was then, and is to this day, sparsely settled, and inhabited by an ignorant and superstitious class of people, not unlike, in many respects, the Gipsies themselves.

"If this is not a wild country I'd like to know where one could be found," said Andy, after the second day's journey was at an end. "Nothing but rocks and trees and hills."

"And a few lazy people," put in Jack.

"Perhaps we shall find something else after a while," remarked Andy.

And they did.

CHAPTER IX.

ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND.

"THIS is a queer country, I must say," declared Jack, one morning, as the rovers came to a halt on the banks of a swift-running stream. "We have not seen a single house for more than an hour, and people are scarce as hen's teeth, I should say. At least, we haven't come across anybody lately."

"Here comes a man now," said Andy.

The stranger was mounted on a small, scurvy-looking horse, which in that country is called a bronco, and horse and rider looked very much alike, both having about the color of the yellow earth. The man was a queer specimen, but, withal, a genuine native in every respect.

"Good-evening," he said, as he rode up.

"Good-evening," returned Andy, who was usually the spokesman for the party.

"Whar ye bound?" said the man.

"Texas," replied Andy.

"A right smart distance from yer, that is," said the stranger. "Whar do ye come from—Missouri?"

"No; Kentucky."

"Don't tell me. Do ye know Jim Young over thar?"

"No; but I know Bill Jones," returned Andy, dryly.

"I don't know him," said the man. "What ye got to trade?"

"Nothing."

"Anything to sell?"

"I guess not."

"Nothing ter give away, I reckon?"

"No."

"Like ter swap hosses?"

"I think not."

He turned to leave, but before going surveyed the Gipsies sharply, and said:

"I'm lookin' arter a stray critter, and maybe you can tell me whar it is. By the way, I smell meat a-fryin', and I'd jist like ter know whar that meat kin from. P'rhaps it's a slice o' my critter."

He jumped from his horse and soon had the lid of the spider in his hand.

"It ain't my critter, that's a fact," he exclaimed, in a half-disappointed way. "I thought it might be, but it ain't; it's the j'ints of a wild turkey that's a-fryin'. My critter is a yearlin' calf."

Without any additional remarks he mounted his horse and rode away.

"Talk about Yankee inquisitiveness," said Jack, after the man was gone; "if this fellow is a specimen of the rest of the inhabitants, they are the most curious people in the world. I, for one, would like to get out of the country."

This was the feeling of the boys at first, but they got over it soon, and seemed to enjoy, rather than dislike, the wilderness of rocks and hills which lay around them. They were both used to rough fare, could sleep on the ground as well as in a bed, enjoyed coarse food, and could stand any amount of walking and labor of the road.

Some days the Gipsies would remain in camp, in order that their horses might have rest and abundant food, and such occasions were invariably made use of by Jack and Andy in searching the woods for nuts and berries, climbing trees for wild grapes and plums, and scouring the valleys and uplands in quest of game. Of the latter, there was so great an abundance that the boys kept the camp well supplied with meat of various kinds, and, besides, had many exciting adventures with the larger game, such as deer, bears, wolves, panther and wild-cat. Andy killed one of the latter one morning before breakfast, and the same day Jack had a desperate struggle with a bear, and would have lost his life had not a large dog named Nero

a member of the Gipsy camp, come to his rescue. The bear was of the black species, of medium size, and very hungry, else he would not have attacked Jack as he did. Usually these animals sneak away at the first approach of a dog or man, but this one behaved quite to the contrary; he made for Jack the moment the boy came in view, but Nero met him on the way, and gave battle at once.

Jack knew that the dog was no match for the bear, so, unmindful of danger, he rushed forward, and thrusting the muzzle of his gun almost in the mouth of the black monster, pulled the trigger. The gun did not go off: only the cap exploded, and to Jack's horror, the bear turned and made a rush at him. The brave dog caught the monster by the hind leg and held him back, while the boy rained blow after blow with his clubbed gun on the head of the brute, which so stunned and bewildered him that Jack was able to finish him with a knife.

It was the hardest work of the boy's life, and when he reached camp that night he was completely exhausted. The dog, Nero, was also badly used up. He had lost one of his ears and a portion of his tail, and one eye had been put in mourning by a stroke of the bear's paw. In fact, it required several days for the two heroes to recover from the combat.

There were other adventures of a similar nature during the two weeks' time consumed in crossing the mountains of northern Arkansas, and when they reached the river of that name, it seemed as if they had passed through innumerable hardships and perils, and had barely escaped with their lives.

"Which way do we go now?" was the query of the boys, as the river was reached.

Andy thought they would cross the river, and continue their southern course, while Jack, who had studied the map considerably, of late, said it was only a short distance to the Indian territory, and argued that it would be more in keeping with good judgment and reason to go that way. At any rate, one thing was certain, the worst of the journey was over, a fact which gave both Jack and Andy a great deal of satisfaction.

The Gipsy band remained some days camped on the river bank. There was a small village about a mile from the place, and thither the boys directed their steps occasionally, playing for the rude villagers and gathering thereby small sums of money, which they regularly turned over to the Gipsy king, who praised them for their industry and bade them gather in as much more as possible.

And the old witch, Mad Ellen, was not idle, either; she had a string of visitors every day, credulous kind of people, persons of all ages, men, women and children, all anxious to have their fortunes told.

In this way several days passed. At length business got dull, and the Gipsies talked of leaving.

"We'll leave this wretched country with the rising of another sun," said the Gipsy king, who, however good his fortune in a place, always made it a point to curse the country he was in and damn the people for a lot of barbarians.

The night previous to the start Jack took his violin and wandered off down the river.

He was feeling restless that night, and wanted to be alone that he might think over the past and contemplate on the future.

About a mile from camp he halted, and taking a position on a rock that overlooked the river, began to play his violin.

He played softly at first, a quiet strain, then faster and faster, one tune after another, until the air was full of the wild melody.

After awhile he put aside his violin, and placing his face in his hands, began to think. He thought of all that had happened since he ran away from the city, and his mind went out in vague wonderings what would come next.

Jack felt strangely alone that night, and even his violin failed to keep him company. It was such a ghostly night, too; the moon shone so very bright,

the shadows of the trees bore the appearance of moving figures on the ground, and the sweep of the river hard by, all went to increase the feeling of loneliness which seemed to have taken hold of Jack so strongly.

"I wish the stars wouldn't shine so bright," he muttered aloud, at length; "and as for the moon—somehow I allers feel sort o' graveyard-like when I'm alone under the moonshine. I've been told that the moon is the face of the good Lord lookin' at us through the sky, and that the stars are his fingers poking through and a-pointin' at us. Maybe it's so, and maybe it isn't. I don't know."

He ceased talking, and with his violin against his breast looked in silent wonder at the broad expanse of blue, so beautiful and so mysterious.

"It just seems as though I don't amount to anything," he finally said. "It's about as that big preacher in New York told me one day when I was blacking his boots. If you want to know how little the world would miss you if you sh'd die, he said, run a cambric needle in the ice of a mill-pond and then withdraw it. Can you find the hole? Not much you can't. And that's about the amount of space one seller occupies in the world. As for myself, I'm worse off than that—I'm nobody, I'm nothing, not even a grain of sand."

He stopped talking suddenly, for over the water not a hundred yards away, just gliding from the shadows that lined the opposite shore, was a small boat containing three men.

Jack caught the sound of voices, and as he watched the boat he saw that it would effect a landing not far from where he was sitting, and he therefore felt that the best thing he could do was to get out of the way at soon as possible.

"If I know myself," he said, "I'll get out of this at once. It won't do to be found here. How do I know who these men are or what they want? I'm getting mighty suspicious of strangers."

A few steps up the bank was a large tree, the trunk slightly bent, the leaves very thick, and the branches on one side growing low to the ground.

Under this tree Jack halted a moment and turned his eyes on the approaching boat, then, grasping a stout limb that hung near his head, he swung himself, squirrel-fashion, into the tree.

"I guess nobody can see me here," he said, completely hidden among the leaves. "I wouldn't have them sellers clap eyes on me for the world."

He did not know why he felt that way, only that the men were strangers, and coming in such a way, and at night, he felt that he had reason to be distrustful.

Swiftly the boat came on. Jack's eyes were on it every moment. Pretty soon he could see the occupants very distinctly. Two of them were white men, while the third was a negro. The latter was very black and quite aged in appearance, the thick wool that crowned his head being sharply flecked with gray. The white men were rough-looking fellows, dark of feature, cunning, low-browed and villainous, and both were well armed.

The boy in the tree took note of all these things, and his fear and curiosity were both aroused as he saw that the negro was a prisoner; his hands were tied behind him and his feet were bound with heavy cords. He was, in fact, completely in the power of his captors, who evidently intended him some injury.

As the boat touched the shore the negro began to whine piteously; he begged to be set at liberty and implored his brutal captors to spare his life.

"Stop yer beggin' and go to prayin'," growled one of the men. "I'm about tired of your nonsense. If I had my way about it, instead of hanging you in a civilized sort of way, I'd shoot you on the spot. It's a heap sight more trouble to hang a man than it is to shoot him. Come, now, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"I didn't do nuffin'," mumbled the negro. "Ise on'y a poor old man, an' I don't want to die fo'

while yet. I'll jes work fo' yo' all de res' ob my life ef yo' ll on'y let me lib."

"What's the use of fooling with the old thief?" demanded the other man. "Let's hang the black wretch to the nearest tree."

As it happened, the "nearest tree" was the one in which Jack was concealed.

"They're going to hang the nigger right before my eyes," said the boy. "I wish I could help him get away. It's awful. I wonder what he has done. I should think from what they say he is an old thief. Perhaps he has only captured a chicken or two from some plantation; but that is enough to hang a nigger down here. What if the brutes should see me. Very likely they'd hang me, too."

It took the combined strength of the two men to drag the struggling negro to the tree; but they got him there at length, and then, while one of them held him against the tree, the other took a stout rope and bound him securely to the trunk of the tree, taking care that his feet and hands should be well secured. Meanwhile, the poor wretch howled and groaned piteously and continually begged for mercy.

Jack watched the proceedings very closely. Evidently the men did not contemplate murder outright, but they were going to murder the negro by a slow process; they would leave him there in that wilderness tied to a tree, without any hope of help from any quarter, and with the certainty of being devoured by wild animals, or, if not that, of slowly starving to death. It was more horrible than immediate death. Jack shuddered as he thought of it. Could it be possible these men would be guilty of such monstrous cruelty.

The negro was almost overcome with terror. He could no longer cry aloud; he could only moan and beg in whispers.

With a parting curse, and a wish that the poor wretch might never cease to suffer, the white brutes took their departure.

Then, for a few seconds, all was still.

CHAPTER X.

AMONG THE SHADOWS.

JACK was still in the tree, and during all the noise below he had kept perfectly quiet; but now that the men were gone, he thought it would be safe to make a change of position.

So without more delay he swung himself down from the tree, by the aid of one of the trailing branches, and a moment later stood facing the astonished negro, who little thought any human being was so near.

"Sakes alive!" he ejaculated; "who de worl' am hyr now? Seems like ebbrybody am tryin' fo' to murder me to-night. Go 'way, boy, an' lemme 'long!"

"But I'm your friend," said Jack. "I am here to help you."

"Whar did yo' come from?"

"Up the tree."

The African groaned.

"Go 'way—go 'way!" he cried. "I knows what you am; I se'e'd such as you afore; you's a ghost. Don't put yer cold hand on me, but jes' cl'ar out an' lemme alone!"

The negro was badly frightened, and it took Jack some little time to convince him that he—Jack—was not a ghost but a human being, and one who meant him no harm.

"I'll cut the rope, if you've got a knife," said the boy, eager to free the now almost-paralyzed African.

"The villains tied you pretty tight."

Unfortunately, the negro was not the possessor of a knife, so Jack was obliged to use his hands and teeth, and work diligently with both before he could make any impression on the tightly-drawn knots.

He succeeded at length, however, and the cords fell from the negro's feet and hands, and he was once more a free man.

Then Jack and he hurriedly left the spot, and be-

took themselves to the depths of the forest, where they knew they would be safe from capture should the murderous villains who had attempted the life of the African return.

Once they halted in the full light of the moon, and Jack gave the negro a searching look. There was something about the man that seemed familiar. What it was, Jack did not know.

He looked again and again; he recalled the faces he had seen in the past; he looked with wondering eyes; then, all of a sudden, there appeared before his vision an old African whom Jack remembered as "one of the Templetons"—Black Tom, by name.

"Is it possible?" cried the boy, seizing the negro by the shoulder. "I thought I had seen you before, and now I know who you are. Black Tom, or I'm a sinner?"

The negro surveyed the lad with rolling eyes.

"Golly mighty!" at length he cried; "I reckon I knows yo', boy. By de bones ob de great prophet Isaiah! I se'e de mos' 'stonished nigger in de worl'! I se'e mighty sartin I knows yo'. Ain't yo' de fellah what's name is Jack?"

"That's the ticket," replied the boy. "I am Jack, the fiddler, and don't you forget it."

"Jack, de fiddler," repeated the African.

"Yes, that's it."

"An' didn't you, boy, steal Gipsy from her poor ole father—ain't you de bad boy what did it?"

"Not much, old man, not much I didn't steal her; and if you go to talking that way, I'll wish I had left you tied to the tree. I'm only Jack, the fiddler, and I never stole anything in my life."

The negro began to realize the situation.

"Sakes alive! how queer," he finally said. "I se'e 'stonished to see you. Dis am a strange Providence, Massa Jack. Whar' hab yo' been all dis long while?"

"It's a long story. I can't tell you all," replied the boy. "I have a few questions to ask you, and I don't want anything but the truth."

"Dat's what ye shall git. Go on."

"Do you know anything of the Templetons? Where are they, and is Gipsy alive or dead?"

Black Tom's head hung low on his breast. He did not speak for several seconds, then he said:

"De Templetons hab all gibben up de ghost; dey am no more."

"What! you don't tell me they are dead—not dead?"

"I didn't say dat, but I tells ye, Massa Jack, like de children ob Israel, dey hab gone dis way, an' dat way, an' all ober, and so whar' am dey?"

"And Gipsy?" said Jack.

"Oh, de poo' little gal, I'd gib de worl' to hab her in my arms. I reckon Gipsy am dead."

"No!"

"But I calculate she am. De robbers stole her away, an' den murdered her."

"What robbers?" said Jack. "Explain yourself."

"Why, de robbers dat stole Gipsy. One day Massa Templeton got a letter, and it read something like dis: 'Gib us heaps ob money, an' we'll return yer little gal; fail to do dis, an' we'll murder her.' What do yo' s'pose de old boss did?"

"He began to investigate, I suppose," said Jack.

"Dat's it; investigate. But he couldn't get Gipsy back; de robbers got frightened, and run away, an' so the old boss got sick at heart, an' said he was gwine fo' to go to California, whar he thought de robbers had spirited away de gal. Oh, it made awful work. De plantation was sold, an' all de niggers hed to scatter, an' dere was howlin' an' gnashin' ob teeth fo' weeks an' weeks."

"Then he started across the plains," said Jack; "he left at once?"

"Yes; anodder ob dem terrible letters started him at once. It was from de robbers, an' dey war dere, jes' as Massa Templeton thought. He didn't wait long after dat; he jes' sold off eb'ry t'ing, an' den joined a party ob feilahs, an' was gone."

"Heart-broken, I suppose," said Jack.

"Worse than that now," replied the negro, "he is dead."

"Dead!"

"Dat's what I say, Massa Jack; dead! It don't take much ob a man to die; any common niggah can do dat, but de old boss was killed."

"Not murdered?"

"Yes, murdered."

"Who did it?"

"Injuns."

"I begin to understand you; know what you mean. and it is awful. In company with others, he started across the plains, and the party was murdered by Indians. Isn't that the way of it?"

"Dat am it perxactly. We got de news 'bout a month after he was gone. May de good Lord keep de little gal Gipsy from harm; she hab nobody to look to now but him."

Jack was silent.

He was thinking what a cruel fate was Gipsy's, and wondering if he would ever see her again.

"This is a strange world, old man," he said, at length. "I didn't expect ever to see you again, and as for the Templetons, you have told me news very strange and queer. It may be that I shall be able to find Gipsy one of these days. Who can tell?"

Black Tom shook his head.

"De Lor' only knows," he said, "de Lor' only knows."

Still shone the moon silently down; still the stars glistened; still the river went sweeping by on its way to the sea, and for several minutes neither the boy or the man spoke a word. Finally Jack said:

"It is after midnight. Let us go to the Gipsy camp."

It was not a very long walk, and the two friends were soon there, Andy being the first to see them.

"Where in the world have you been, Jack?" he said, petulantly. "I thought maybe somebody had run away with you. Who is this with you?"

"A friend," replied Jack.

"His color is pretty substantial," said Andy. "What sort of a friend is he?"

"An old friend."

"A nigger friend?"

"Yes: I'll tell you all about him."

In a very few words, Jack told what had happened, all about the hanging of the negro, or the threats to that effect, how his brutal captors had tied him to a tree, and there left him, as they supposed, to perish of hunger, or to become the prey of wild beasts; and then, all about the negro's connection with the Templetons, and, finally, how the party of travelers to the Pacific Coast, of whom John Templeton was one, had met death at the hands of the Indians, only a few weeks before.

"Wasn't it awful?" remarked Andy. "And then to think of the little girl Gipsy not knowing anything about it. I wonder what has become of her. Perhaps this old man can put us on the trail."

"He has already," said Jack. "Gipsy is supposed to be in California."

Turning to the negro, Andy said:

"You had a narrow escape, my black friend. What had you been doing?"

"Nuslin," was the short reply.

"Are you sure of that?"

"Jes' 'bout as sure as I am ob anythin'. Dey 'cused me ob stealin', but I nebber stole nuslin. I'se a free niggah, an' dare's whar de trouble is. Don't you reckon some ob 'em will catch me yer?"

"No, I think not," said Andy. "You must keep dark, and then they won't catch you."

"He's pretty dark already, I should say," remarked Jack, dryly.

"Just so."

While they were talking Mad Ellen put in an appearance.

"Who is this black wretch?" she asked.

"A friend of mine," replied Jack.

"Hum! a nigger. Better run your knife into him."

More trouble for Black Tom. He began to look frightened.

"It's all right," said Jack to the trembling Afri-

can; "the old gal is a little cross to-night, but she is perfectly harmless."

"I don't know 'bout dat," said Tom.

"But I do. I say, auntie?"

"Well, say it then."

"You don't seem to like the black race; but I tell you this nigger is a tip-top fellow."

"Hum! I'se warrant he's a thief."

"It's jest a big mistake you t'ink I'se a t'ief," put in Black Tom. "I nebber stole anyt'ing from nobody, nebber. I'se a high-toned, Christian nigger, I is, an' I don't care who knows it."

"Of course you don't care who knows it," said Jack, "but what I wish to do is to convince this old lady that such is the case."

The old hag did not appear to hear the remarks of the youth; she grumbled a little as she stood by the fire, then scattering a few dry pieces of bark on the smoldering coals, wrapped a blanket around her and sought her tent.

"If we are going to get any sleep to-night," said Andy, after she was gone, "we had better pitch in soon. It's mighty near morning now."

There were blankets enough for all, and Andy and the negro, making use of one apiece, lay down by the fire and were soon soundly asleep.

"I guess I'll stay up an' look at the stars awhile," remarked Jack, who was not very sleepy.

He seated himself on a log near at hand, and with his head and shoulders covered by a blanket, Indian fashion, looked up at the sky, and gave full freedom to his thoughts.

He could see the yellow moon hanging like a ball in the heavens, the stars shining through the drifting clouds, the ocean of blue, so full of mystery, the tall trees waving above and around him, and as the moments flew by, there came trooping up from the past hundreds of familiar faces, some young, some old; houses, fields and meadows and velvet lawns swept by, there was a rude stile and a winding path, and there, yes, right before him, with her little lithe figure and laughing eyes, was Gipsy Templeton!

Jack was dreaming.

CHAPTER XI.

A DANGEROUS JOURNEY.

The camp was astir by daybreak, and Jack and Andy were aroused by the rough voice of old King Victor, who, bending over them, said:

"It's time we were off; are you going to sleep forever? Rouse up."

Once on his feet, Jack looked around for the darky, but that sable personage was nowhere to be seen.

"Have you seen anything of the black rascal?" he asked of Andy.

"I have not," was the reply.

"I wonder if he hasn't skipped out," said Jack.

"It's quite likely he has," replied Andy: "and it may be well for us to see if our pocket-books are safe. I didn't like the looks of the old chap."

Black Tom was surely gone, but contrary to the expectation of even Jack himself, nothing of value was missing from the camp."

"He thought he had fallen in with a bad crowd, I guess," said Andy, "and so took this opportunity to depart for other pastures. Pity you hadn't left him to his fate last night."

"I don't think so, Andy," said Jack.

"Why don't you?"

"Because by saving his life I have learned all about the Templetons. I know better now what to do."

"Well, I'm with you, Jack; you know that," said Andy, "and if you think the gal's worth searching for—"

"Worth searching for, Andy?"

"Yes."

"Gipsy Templeton!"

"I didn't mean anything, Jack. I know she is worth two of us, and if we can find her, we'll do it if it takes us ten years to do it in. I'm awfully 'shamed

about that nigger, though, and I'd like to kick him from one end of the State to the other; he deserves it."

At a point not a great distance down the river from where they were camped, they were ferried over by a man by the name of Racket, who took the whole crowd over, including the wagon and horses, for two dollars, and took his pay in trade; that is, the old lady told his fortune.

The company then hurried on in a southwesterly direction, traveling rapidly, halting only at night, moving this way for several weeks without interruption.

"We are pretty well south, I should say," remarked Andy, one day, as he noticed how warm it was, and how summer-like all things appeared.

"We are in the State of Texas," responded Jack, confidently. "Don't you see that white stuff growing yonder?"

"Yes; what is it?"

"Cotton."

It was a novel sight to the boys, and they looked over the field with curious eyes.

"I tell you, Jack, I like this kind of a State," said Andy, with enthusiasm. "I like to see big fields of cotton, and I'd like to work in 'em along with the niggers. Wouldn't it be fun?"

"Perhaps it would, and perhaps it wouldn't," returned Jack. "I think you'd rather fiddle for a living, after you'd worked in a cotton-field a while. I would anyway."

The halts made by the Gipsy band while passing through the northern portion of the State were infrequent and short, but once in more populous districts the strollers pitched their tents and remained as long in a place as there was any chance of gain.

All that winter Jack and Andy led this roving life with the Gipsies. It was a wild sort of existence, full of exciting adventures and burdened with hopes and fears and many disappointments; there were trials and hardships too numerous to mention, and rebuffs that would send a chill to the stoutest heart.

So the weeks and months passed, and when the long summer days had come, and the breath of sunny Mexico, laden with the perfume of palm-trees and wild roses and orange groves, touched the cheeks of the strollers, they found themselves on the Rio Grande, not far from the beautiful city of San Antonio, nestling among the hills. It seemed to the boys that they had reached a paradise, such as they had read about in song and story.

"This is a beautiful country," said Andy. "I could live here always."

"I could too," returned Jack, "but for one thing."

"What is that?"

"I want to find Gipsy."

Andy sighed.

He began to think Jack was going crazy.

"You will not find her here," he said; "if she is alive she is in another country—California. I think I should like to go there, Jack. What do you say?"

Jack grasped at the idea at once, but he failed to see how it could be carried into execution.

"It's a long distance, and a wild country," he observed, thoughtfully.

"And plenty of Injuns on the way," put in Andy. "I don't know much about Injuns, but 'tis said they are great hair-dressers."

"And scalp-lifters," retorted Jack.

"Yes, I have heard so."

While they were talking, the Gipsy king put in an appearance, and Jack asked him what he thought of California, and what chance there was to get there.

"It's the place for us," replied the old man, shaking his tangled locks. "It is said there is gold in California in abundance, and that is what we are after. What do I care for danger, time, or distance, so that I get money and riches? Let the old witch, Mad Ellen, tell us what to do. She will read the future for us by the stars in the sky, and the answer will come in the wind, which she alone can interpret."

As if she knew her presence was desired, Mad Ellen stepped up at this moment, and the Gipsy king requested her to mark out the future course of the party, and do it at once.

"Study the signs well, old woman," he said, "study them well. If the voices of the night and of the dead who speak to you through the stars and by the wind tell us to go, then shall we go. Let the delay be short. We await your answer."

He waved her off, and retired himself to the seclusion of his tent.

The following morning the decision of the old hag was announced; it was that the band should start at once for California and make the trip in as short a time as possible.

"It is a long, long distance," said the old woman, "and there are many dangers on the way. It will be necessary to prepare well for the journey."

The Gipsy king and his men had a way of getting hold of property, such as horses, cattle, and things to eat, that was beyond the understanding of Jack and Andy. In less than a week after it was decided to go to California, the old man had secured a good outfit, consisting of two large covered wagons, six head of horses, three dogs, guns and pistols without number, plenty of blankets and an abundance of provisions.

"I think he must take things that don't belong to him," remarked Andy, as he and Jack looked over the outfit. "I would call it stealing."

"So would I," said Jack. "But these fellows are of the kind that think the world owes 'em a living. I for one don't look at it in that way."

"What if the old scamp should be caught in some of his tricks?" suggested Andy, with some uneasiness.

"I would rather not be in company with the crowd when that time comes," said Jack. "Gipsy is only another name for thief, so far as this crowd is concerned. They are a mighty hard set, I tell you."

"Do you think any of 'em would murder?"

"If the gain was great enough, they would. The old man is a treacherous old dog depend upon it."

The boys were now well satisfied that King Victor was an old rascal and the rest of the crowd of the same stripe. Still it was now too late to part company with them, and then, besides, they were very desirous to visit California, and they saw no other way of getting there than by going with the Gipsies.

"Whatever happens, Andy," said Jack, "we must stick together. It is not necessary for us to steal and rob because they do. Once in California, we will shift for ourselves."

Preparations for the journey having been fully made, the Gipsy band moved off, taking a course due west from the ancient city of San Antonio, where they had secured the last of their outfit.

For the first hundred miles the trail was excellent, then it seemed to widen out; there were streams to cross, and hills to climb, and winding gullies to follow. The whole country was a desolate wilderness, inhabited only by Indians and a few desperate white men. Still the California trail was tolerably well marked, and the travelers managed to keep it pretty well.

The second day out the first adventure of the journey occurred. It was along toward evening that the Gipsy party came to a halt at the command of a rough voice proceeding from a low tent situated on what might be termed a cross-roads.

"Halt! strangers," cried the voice, "an' don't be long about it either. I'd like to have a little talk with ye."

The speaker was a fair specimen of the Texas frontiersman. He was tall and slim, his hair was yellow and long, there was a cadaverous look in his face, and a slobber of tobacco-juice over his sunburnt whiskers; his garments were of the coarsest kind, his hat was white, the crown full of holes and the rim turned up in front. He was likewise a small arsenal of knives and pistols, and the long-barreled

gun that he held in his hand looked wicked and ominous.

The Gipsies looked at this human monster in silent terror.

There he stood, with his long body bent forward, his gray eyes making keen observations, his rifle still raised, and a look of general viciousness about him that is hard to explain.

"Wal, who are you fellows, anyhow?" at length growled the stranger. "It's my business to ax questions and yours to answer. Jes' trot out your plans."

"We are only travelers," said Jack.

"Only travelers!" repeated the man, with a sneer. "And do you carry yer own whisky?"

"I think so," replied the lad.

"Then you refuse to patronize me, do ye?" said the stranger, sharply.

"Patronize you! What do you mean?"

"Why, patronize me, buy your liquor of me, drink at my bar."

"What have you to drink?" asked the Gipsy king.

The man pointed to a canvas arrangement nearby, under which was a small table, two or three rough stools and a whisky barrel.

"Thar's the ful outfit," he said, with a show of enthusiasm. "A barrel of whisky, and a deck of cards, an' thar's millions in it. I started this scheme fifteen years ago, and now I am a rich man. It's a lively business. You see, this is a cross-roads, or rather here is whar' the west an' the south trails come together. Everybody that passes either way stops and sees me, and sometimes thar's playing yer from morn till night, an' whisky jes' a-flowing. Nobody comes yer unless they drinks, and it's all cash. And then, once in a while, say every other week, I manage to kill a stranger or two with lots of dust, an' I throws thar bodies in the bushes fer the crows to eat. Fer instance, ef you fellers hadn't 'a' halted when I guv the word, I'd 'a' massacred the hull crowd of ye, an' then went through yer pockets."

This was a queer way of collecting toll, the Gipsies thought, but as the man evidently meant what he said they drank his poor whisky and paid him for the same at liberal rates.

"I allers aim to give every one his money's worth," said the merchant of the border, "an' I hope none of ye will go away feelin' grieved. I am an honest man—"

"You are a robber!" put in the Gipsy chief, now thoroughly aroused. "What right have you to levy a tax on innocent travelers?"

"Don't I own this land?" asked the stranger, with a sneer.

"I don't know. Do you?"

"Yes, I reckon I do. I bought it of the State in the regular way, an' I'm trying to cultivate it."

The Gipsy king did not think further argument would do any good, and it might provoke trouble; so he ordered a forward movement of the party, and was glad enough to escape with his life.

"We have passed one danger," said Jack, "but we may look for others right along from now on. What if we should meet a hostile band of savages, what could we do?"

King Victor shrugged his shoulders; he was well aware that they were now in the Indian country, and that it would be all but impossible to keep clear of the many prowling bands that were constantly scouring the plains.

The first few weeks of the journey, and no Indians were encountered, but toward the close of a hard day's journey there was seen a short distance in advance a train of four wagons.

The discovery occasioned not a little excitement among the Gipsies, who, not knowing whether the strangers were white or red, friends or foes, were loth to approach them.

However, a shout from the moving wagons in advance satisfied the Gipsies that their presence was known, so they boldly pushed forward

"I hope the strangers are not Indians," said Jack, who was feeling somewhat nervous over the prospect."

"A bad white man is more to be feared than a bad Indian," remarked the Gipsy king, suggestively.

The strangers were moving very slowly, and the Gipsy train would soon overtake them.

CHAPTER XII.

A BLOODY EXPERIENCE.

"THEY'RE a queer looking set, them sellers, and I wonder who they are?" said one of the travelers be longing to the four wagons.

"Pikes from Missouri," laughed another of the men. "Did you ever see a full-blooded Pike?"

"No."

"Well, they always travel about like this gang a-coming—only with more dogs to the outfit. There isn't much glory in traveling that way, as I see it."

There were ten men belonging to the train and three women and four children, and all were out looking at the Gipsy band coming slowly toward them.

Either Intentionally or otherwise, Jack and Andy had managed to get several yards in advance of the party, and the first that was said by the strangers was spoken to them.

One of the company, a rather good-looking man, was the spokesman.

"A queer lot of prairie rats you are," he said, by way of introduction. "Where are you going?"

"To California," replied Jack, stoutly.

"You'll never get there, my lad," avowed the stranger, smiling.

"And why not, pray?"

"The wind will blow you away, or the grasshoppers will eat you—"

"Or the wolves will take ye," put in a tall man with long yellow hair.

"I am not afraid," said Jack. "But where are you going?"

"California."

"Then we are traveling the same way. Why not go together?"

"Well," said the man, "I don't mind it, if the crowd suits. The bigger the company the better for us, through this wilderness. It's the most perilous journey I ever undertook. If we are not all scalped and hung up to dry inside of a week then I'm no prophet. But here comes the boss himself."

King Victor, with his shaggy head and keen grey eyes, was a little in advance of the rest of the party and just then, as he came hobbling along, seemed wonderfully old and care-worn, and, withal, very weird and strange.

"An uncouth looking chap," said one of the men. "Who is he?"

"King of the Gipsies," replied Andy.

"And that's the sort of crowd you are! I thought you were only travelers."

"And so we are—Gipsy travelers and fortune-tellers."

The men laughed.

Then the Gipsy king put in a word, and the conversation became sharp and general, and there was much wit and laughter expended.

Finally the Gipsies were assured of the protection of the emigrants if they saw fit to accompany them, and withal the entire company, now on the friendliest terms, pushed on deeper into the unbroken wilds.

It was a tedious journey, full of dangers and perils, requiring great watchfulness on the part of the men.

So far very few Indians had been seen, and yet reports were current that the country was full of them.

But at length there came a change in this respect. One day, while the company was at dinner, there came into camp several Indians, and that night a horse was missing.

This was the first installment of trouble.

The next day quite a company of savages, desperate-looking rascals, painted and plumed, put in an appearance.

What did they want?

Not much at first, for they were very quiet and orderly, but this lasted only a short time when they began to show their true colors.

One of the rascals, watching his opportunity, appropriated a fine hat belonging to one of the company, and, not content with this, stole a pipe out of the pocket of the same traveler.

This started the rest.

If one of their number could make a successful raid on the whites, the others could do the same, and thereupon all started out to pilfer indiscriminately.

Finally, one swarthy brute made a raid on the private apartment of the boys, and was about to get away with their musical instruments, both harp and violin, when, quick as a flash, Andy picked up a heavy stone and hurled it at the red-skin, striking him full on the head, and he went over like a ship in a storm.

Then he howled and kicked, and two or three painted imps made a rush at the boy as if they would tear him limb from limb.

"Jack! Jack!" cried Andy, who thought of no one else in time of danger.

Jack was promptly on hand, and the second missile that was thrown flew from his fingers and struck the foremost savage full in the stomach, and he, too, went over howling.

Then there was a good deal of noise made by both whites and reds, and some sharp, savage talk followed, and finally, with menacing gestures and yells fierce and loud, the red-skins mounted their ponies and galloped away over the hills.

"They'll be back after awhile, depend upon it," said the leader of the emigrants; "and the best thing we can do now is to prepare for them."

This was evident to all, except, perhaps, the Gipsy king, who laughed at the idea that the Indians meant them any harm.

"You are an old fool," said the leader of the emigrants, wrathily, speaking to King Victor. "These Indians are Apaches, a tribe that has always been at war with the whites. It will be mighty good luck if we are not all murdered in cold blood."

After a short consultation it was decided to move rapidly forward, and, if driven into a fight by the Indians, make breastworks of their wagons and die fighting like heroes.

Now that they knew their danger, the greatest care was taken on the way; the weapons of the men were always ready for service, and at night the camp was strongly guarded.

This state of affairs continued several days, and no Indians were seen, although signs of them were numerous.

So the days passed, and at length, after so dangerous a journey, our friends began to feel comparatively safe, although, in reality, they were now in the most hazardous position they had yet been in, for they were in the very heart of the Apache country.

Then Jack and Andy felt gay and light-hearted, and the Gipsies got over their melancholy, and the emigrants were more talkative and free than ever.

One afternoon the boys, who had learned something of the use of the rifle, started out in search of game.

When they left the train they did not expect to be gone long, but observing on the crest of a distant hill a herd of antelope, they gave chase, and soon were miles away from camp and friends.

But the boys, eager to bring down the game, heed not the distance nor the approaching shades of night, but hurried along with their guns in their hands ready for instant service.

Pretty soon Jack, who was the more thoughtful of the two, halted and said:

"I think we have gone far enough. It's no use

tryin' to get a shot at these mountain-deer; they are too fleet-footed and sharp of ear. Let's return to the train."

"Agreed," said Andy, and they turned and slowly retraced their steps.

It was then that Jack noticed that it was rapidly growing dark, and he mentioned the fact to his companion and the two quickened their steps to a smart run.

But darkness falls wonderfully fast in that western country, and it was not long before the rocks and distant hills, the somber mounds of earth scattered here and there, the stunted trees along the ravines, were lost in gloom, and the boys were in darkness.

The nights were moonless; only the stars shone; and the prairie was a trackless sea of waving grass.

"We are lost," spoke up Andy at last; "lost for the night, at least. We are just as likely to go one way as another. Are you not turned around, Jack?"

"Yes, badly; I don't know one direction from another. I am 'fraid even now we are going the wrong way."

"Then let's halt," said Andy. "It is folly to go on in this aimless way."

But what was the use of halting? To halt would be to acknowledge that they were lost.

So they continued to wander on, finally reaching what is called in that country a canyon. Its borders were of stunted trees and rocks, with an abundance of thick bushes and rocks running through the center.

Here the boys concluded to pass the rest of the night, if they could find a rocky ledge where they would be out of the wind and also out of sight of any one who might pass that way.

Such a place was very easily found; and our young friends, overcome by fatigue, after they had once lain down to rest were soon soundly asleep.

Neither of them knew anything until three o'clock in the morning, when Jack awoke with a start. He did not know why, but he felt that something was wrong.

"Andy—Andy!" he whispered, shaking that worthy by the arm.

"What is it, old duffer?" replied the boy, still dreaming. "You can't get blood out of a turnip; these folks haven't anything."

"What are you talking about?" questioned Jack rather roughly. "There is something to pay—I don't know what. Get up."

Andy was soon wide awake.

"What's the go?" he asked.

"Listen!" said Jack.

They listened intently, and there came over the prairie a queer mingling of sounds like the noise of battle.

Then a chorus of fierce yells, far distant yet distinct, broke on the air, then followed shrieks and groans, the cracking of rifles, hoarse shouts of command, tramping and snorting of maddened steeds, in all a confusion of sounds terrible and wild.

The boys knew the meaning of it all at once. A fight was in progress, the train was attacked by Indians.

"What shall we do?" asked Andy, in a flurry of excitement. "Can we do anything to help our friends?"

"Come on!" said Jack, shortly; and they left the rocks and started in the direction of the field of strife.

But presently the yelling ceased, there were no sounds of battle, no cries of fear, no shrieks of agony, the prairie was as silent as the grave.

What did it mean? The boys hurried on, their young hearts in a wild flutter.

On they went, stumbling from rock to rock, then reaching the broad prairie they thought the train could not be far away. But they traveled all the rest of the night without finding it, and were still searching when the sun came up the next morning. They

were then on the open prairie, with an ocean of sand all around them.

"This is an awful desert," whispered Jack, "and the deeper we get into it the worse it is."

"Nothing but sand," returned Andy; "nothing but sand. I think now we are certainly lost."

Still on they went, and all that long forenoon not a bird, or crawling thing, was seen, and not a sound broke the awful silence; the prairie was as still as a waveless sea, and over the boundless wilderness of sand, white and glistening in the sun, tramped the boys, who now felt that they were terribly alone.

"We'll never find the train, never," said Andy; but as he spoke Jack pointed upward, and there sailing in the air was a hawk, and then another, and still another, all circling around the same point.

"Keep your eye on them," said Jack; "they will guide us, if anything will, I am sure. Soe! they are even now preparing to touch the ground."

The boys were not mistaken.

Where the vultures found a landing there was the battle-field, and there the boys found the mangled bodies of men, women and children scattered here and there over the plain.

It was a sad and painful sight, this gory battle-field, and once on the spot where had raged the fiercest fight, our young friends halted and gazed around them in silent terror.

"And all this happened, and we not a mile away," said Andy,

"We must have traveled back and forth this morning," returned Jack; "or perhaps just circled around. This is a terrible sight, and had we been here, we too, would have been killed."

Many of the wagons were torn to pieces and overturned, boxes and barrels were scattered around, and all movable articles that seemed of any value to the victorious party were carried away.

The attack on the train had very likely been so sudden and unexpected that the travelers could offer only a feeble resistance, and those who did make a stand were soon overpowered. Some of the bodies were beyond recognition, the limbs were torn off, faces mangled in a horrible manner, and scalps taken.

One thing the boys noticed, and wondered at it; there was not a Gipsy body among the slain!

What did it mean?

Jack looked at Andy, but said nothing; Andy looked at Jack, and was silent.

Could any one solve the terrible mystery?

CHAPTER XIII.

DARKNESS AND DAYLIGHT.

THE boys did not stay long on that gory battle-field; they were fearful lest they, too, might be murdered, and so hurried away as fast as they could go.

But first they filled a capacious leather pouch with provisions, and secured their instruments, harp and violin, which, strange to say, were found without a cord or string broken.

Westward they took their way, and all the rest of that day, and for several days following, they traveled without seeing any one, or meeting with any signs of civilization.

Finally their provisions gave out, and then came a search for water, followed by a dreadful thirst, and the horrible thought that death might come to them in that form.

Faint from hunger, and almost dead from thirst, one night the boys stretched themselves on the ground, and with the moon and stars watching over them, were soon soundly asleep.

And they were still sleeping when the sun came up, and were only awakened when a rough voice, followed by a coarse laugh, sounded in their ears.

"What sort of a nest is this?" exclaimed the voice; and Jack and Andy both sprung to their feet at once.

"I say, look yer, fellers," continued the speaker; "here is something rich. Did ye ever see such a nest afore?"

About a dozen men gathered around our young friends, and all were curious to know who they were and where they came from, and no less curious were Jack and Andy in regard to the strangers who had thus surprised them.

The latter claimed to be gold prospectors, while two at least of the company belonged to that class of frontiersmen known as Indian scouts.

To these hardy sons of the prairie Jack and Andy told their story, how they had started to cross the plains in company with the Gipsies, the meeting with the emigrants, the Indians, the bloody battle for life, and other interesting particulars of the terrible journey.

"A bloodthirsty set, these Indians," exclaimed Andy, thinking of the horrible massacre.

"How do you know they were Indians?" spoke up a tall hunter, with a grizzly brown beard.

"Ah! there is the point," said another old ranger. "Did ye see 'em?"

"No," replied Jack.

"Then ye don't know whether Injuns or white men did the business."

The boys were silent.

Jack was thinking of the Gipsy king, and wondering if he were not the treacherous one. It seemed that way at least.

"Never heard of Vasquez, the robber chief, did ye?" questioned the hunter who had spoken first.

"Never heard of him," said Andy.

"Wal, he's what's called a slasher. It is said he does this sort o' business; looks arter the emigrant trains which come over. Wouldn't wonder a bit if it was Vasquez what did the work for your friends."

This was seconded by others, and the latest known exploits of the robber chief were discussed at some length by the men, who seemed to know all about him.

For several hours the boys remained in the company of these men, and then, having been given a fresh supply of food, and with directions how to reach the nearest settlement, they thanked their benefactors and journeyed on.

Nothing occurred worthy of mention the rest of that day, but the day following, just at its close, they were startled by the sounds of music, which seemed to come from out a tangle of trees and vines and rocks, near the wayside.

It was the music of a guitar, and sounded wonderfully sweet and perfect to the boys, who stood stone still and listened for several seconds.

Jack spoke first.

"Another mystery," he said.

"Who is it? What is it? Where is it?" said Andy, with wondering eyes.

"I can't tell ye," said Jack. "It's a guitar, I guess, and it sounds awful sweet."

"Let's answer it," suggested Andy. "Do you catch the air?"

"No."

Andy put his violin to his breast and began to play. Soon Jack accompanied him on his harp.

The air played by the boys was soft and sweet, even more melodious than the strains that fell from the singers of the unseen musician.

Pretty soon the boys ceased playing, and listened.

But they could hear nothing—noting but the songing of the wind through the mountain gorges and the rustling of the tangled vines hard by.

"Whoever the player is he has heard us," whispered Andy, his sharp eyes looking from one side to the other. "I wish the old wretch—"

"You speak like a mutton-head," observed Jack, coolly. "How do you know it's an old wretch?"

"I jes' guessed at it," was the reply.

"It may be a young person," suggested Jack. "I kind o' think it's a fairy."

"A little gal, maybe," said Andy.

"A prairie spirit," returned Jack.

"Gipsy, maybe," said Andy. Jack started.

What an idea this was.

But he could not shake it off.

Despite of all that he could do his mind went back to the green fields of Kentucky, and, again he saw Gipsy Templeton, the black-haired Gipsy, standing in the meadow, keeping time with her little hands to the music of that rickety old violin that he used to play, and laughing with delight as he executed some fantastic movement with the bow. All this passed the vision of the boy in an instant, and when next he spoke it was as if he were dreaming.

"It isn't Gipsy," he said, "I know it isn't," and then he added, after a short pause, "it makes me think of her awfully, this music. Let's hurry along."

He had hardly said this when the bushes parted, and the next moment a tall man, dressed as a monk, with a black robe and a flowing beard, appeared to view.

"Who are you?" demanded Andy, stepping back.

"Ah! Americanos," said the man, smiling and bowing; and then, in tolerable English, "I am glad to see you. Have you traveled far, my sons?"

Jack pointed in the direction they had come, and said:

"Hundreds of miles, old man, hundreds of miles." The monk held up his hands in astonishment.

"Saints preserve us!" he said. "What perils you must have passed!"

"Passed!" repeated Andy; "that is just where you are mistaken; we didn't pass 'em; we just rushed right into 'em."

"Brave boys," said the friar. "How very happy I am to entertain you. The pathway of life is fraught with many dangers."

Jack thought this had gone far enough, so he interrupted the monk with these words, sharply spoken:

"Your blarney may be good enough, but I can't see it. I don't know you, and therefore you'll excuse me if I don't believe quite all you say. For all I know, you may be an infernal scoundrel."

"Horrors!"

The old gray-beard held up his hands in sanctimoniuous surprise.

"I don't say that ye are an old scoundrel," went on Jack, "I only sort o' suspicion ye. Judging by you're looks, you're a preacher."

"A monk," replied the old man. "I live in solitude, and spend my time in thought and meditation. It is seldom that I see a human being. I live isolated from the world."

"By jingo, but you are a good one," spoke up Andy. "Go on."

"My sons," continued the friar, "I mean you no harm. My abode is in yonder valley. Come with me and accept my hospitality."

The home of the old monk was such as no other person would care to have. It was simply an indentation in a rocky hill, though the room in which he lived was large and dry. There were few articles of furniture; a chair, a table, a few books and papers, several cooking utensils and a small writing-desk covered with a green spread.

The friar brought out some food of his own cooking and gave it to the boys.

Then he picked up his guitar and played them a tune. It was the only tune he could play, the boys thought; at least it was the same one he had played a while before, and he declined to try another.

Then Jack and Andy played a tune, not a slow-coach piece, but a loud, rollicking air that fairly made the rocks ring.

The old friar held up his hands in holy horror.

"Such music!" he exclaimed.

"Dance, Andy, dance!" cried Jack, now ready for any sort of fun.

Andy started a double-shuffle, skip-around Irish jig, and only ceased his maneuvers when the monk shouted in a fierce voice:

"Implous lad! I command you to desist. Would you drive me crazy?"

"Whew," panted Andy, seating himself on the floor.

"Didn't know it would hurt your feelings," said Jack, apologetically.

"You are forgiven," replied the monk.

The boys did not think it best to remain longer, but just as they were about to leave, the friar suddenly barred the way with his heavy form, and tearing off his beard and long white hair, grinned slyishly and said:

"Jes stay where you are a while; I want to talk to ye."

Jack was more astonished and frightened than he had ever been before in his life, for there, standing before him, without guise or concealment, was Bill Allen, the overseer, whom Jack would always have occasion to remember as a brutal wretch.

"You know me then?" sneered the bully, as he saw the boy cower.

"I think I do," said Jack, coolly.

"An' ye didn't expect to see me here, I reckon?"

"Well, no; I can't say that I did."

"Then you're surprised."

"Yes."

"And frightened?"

"Don't bully me; I am not a fool."

"Where did you come from?"

"Texas."

"By the south trail?"

"Yes."

"And who is this with you?"

"Andy—my partner."

"Hum."

"What are you 'humming' about?" demanded Jack, hotly. "You ain't slurring out about Andy, are ye?"

Bill Allen gave the boy a savage look.

"Better keep a civil tongue in your head," he snarled. "I know you mighty well—you are a bad boy. What did you do with Gipsy?"

Jack did not reply.

"There is a reward of a few hundred dollars up for you back in Kentucky," went on Allen.

"I can't help that," said Jack.

"Wal," continued Allen, in a communicative way, "the hul business went to pieces; the old man is dead. Gipsy is dead—"

"No, not Gipsy?" cried Jack, excitedly. "How do you know?"

"Dead! of course she is. Her body was found in the creek a week or so after she was missing. And old Templeton is dead, too; tried to cross the plains; Injuns killed him. I came by steamer about three months ago and settled here, as a Spanish friar."

"And do you drive a good business?" asked Jack, with a show of sarcasm in his voice.

"Business, did you say?" observed Allen quickly. "Wal, no; business in this line ain't brisk. I've killed two or three persons lately, to be sure, but the gains were small. I think I'll kill two boys about the next trick I do."

Frolicsome Mr. Allen!

"I tried to make an honest living," went on the wretch, "but somehow I couldn't do it. Finally I struck on this scheme, and it suits me first-rate. The last victim was a miner who was out yer prospecting for gold. I killed him dead!"

At this moment there sounded on the air a chorus of boarse shouts, and looking out, the inmates of the house saw a dozen gleaming guns and as many rough, long-haired men, coming toward them.

CHAPTER XIV.

A GLOOMY PROSPECT.

The boys did not know what to think of this new danger.

Whom were these heavy-bearded, rough-looking men seeking?

"Who ther old boy are ye?" cried Bill Allen, trembling through fear.

"Seize your game, boys!" yelled the leader of the crowd, himself grasping Allen by the shoulder.

"By what authority?" demanded Allen, in a tone of injured innocence.

"By the authority invested in me by the law-givers of Demon Hollow," replied the man, in a rough voice.

Allen trembled.

He had heard of Demon Hollow, and knew it to be a small mining camp whose members, fearless and bold, would not hesitate to take the law in their own hands at any moment.

"Save me!" cried the miserable man, still trembling.

"Then you acknowledge your guilt?" sneered one of the miners.

"What am I guilty of?" demanded Allen.

"Of murder, you wretch!" cried the miner. "It was you who killed poor Ben Hathaway; we know it, every one of us, and don't you dare deny it. Seize the villain, boys, and these two lads, seize them too!"

Rough hands seized the cringing wretch and rough voices yelled into his ears curses loud and long.

The boys were also roughly handled by the enraged miners, and notwithstanding they protested their innocence of any crime, their words went for nothing; they were frightened into silence.

"A nest of thieves," declared one of the miners.

"Ay, not only thieves," returned a comrade, "but murderers. Hanging is too good for them."

The house was searched by two of the men, and a blanket was found which caused considerable of an outcry from the miners.

"This was Ben Hathaway's," declared one of the men, holding the blanket up to view. "There is his name on one corner. See?"

It was even so. The name "Ben Hathaway" was plainly marked on one corner of the blanket.

"That's the man you murdered!" cried the leader of the miners, his voice low with suppressed emotion.

Allen could not speak he was so overcome by fear.

"We had nothing to do with it, Andy or I," spoke up Jack, anxious to get out of the scrape as soon as possible.

"Then what are ye doing here?" demanded one of the miners.

"We are strangers," replied Jack.

"Where are you from?"

"Texas."

The men hooted and laughed, they appeared to think this a most excellent joke.

"If yer from Texas then we know yer bad 'uns," said a heavy bearded man with a long knife in his belt. "I'm from Texas meself."

The miners laughed again.

"Yas," went on the fellow with the heavy beard; "any chap what claims to kin from Texas, put it down ag'in' him thet he's a bad man. I am myself. Better look out for these boys if they come from Texas."

"Don't alarm yourself," said the leader of the party, "we don't intend to let 'em go. They are no doubt just as bad as the man himself."

"Yas, I believe it," observed the man from Texas. "If they hadn't 'a' told whar they kin from, thar'd 'a' been some show of innocence. Ye see, I know these Texas fellers, an' young or old, they are a heap sight on the kill and slay. I am myself."

"We are not guilty," protested Andy.

The miners only laughed.

Jack tried to make an explanation, but the rough gold-diggers booted him into silence.

"It's all up with us," lamented Andy. "This rascal Allen likes company too well to speak a good word for us. Oh, we are done for."

After a thorough examination of the house, the miners started in the direction of their rude camp distant some thirty miles away.

By this time it was quite dark, but the moon would soon be shining, and then it would be light enough to travel.

The miners were mounted. Allen, Jack and Andy were obliged to walk, the former with his hands tied behind him in heavy knots.

It was an awful experience for our young friends: they felt that Heaven had forsaken them.

They walked on in silence.

Unlike the boys, Allen talked a good deal. Once in command of his voice, he stormed and raved, protesting his innocence, chided the miners for interfering with him in his quiet, peaceful life among the hills, and declared himself a martyr to hate and revenge.

"Better keep such talk to yerself," said one of the miners; "we know you, and whether you're innocent or not we are going to hang ye."

This was not very consoling to Mr. Allen, but he had to take it.

"I wonder if they expect us to hoof it all night," remarked Andy, as he saw no signs of a halt.

But he had hardly spoken, when the black-bearded leader of the party suggested that it was about time to "turn in."

"It'll be time enough when we git to Wash Rudolph's ranch, I think," spoke up one of the miners. "It's only just another turn of the road."

They went on.

Rudolph's ranch was reached in a short time, and the old man himself was at the door.

"Got yer game, then, did ye?" he cried, as the miners rode up. "Oh, ho; there are three of them—three rascals."

"Yes, and a bad lot they are, too," replied the leader of the party. "What accommodations can you give us for the rest of the night?"

Wash Rudolph looked about him a moment in silence, then he spoke:

"Rope enough to hang these fellers, and feed enough for yerselves," he said. "That's about all I kin do fer yer."

The bare floor answered the purpose of a bed that night, and all hands slept as best they could.

The miners had taken good care to guard the prisoners during the night, and when morning came they were there as they had left them—the boys with their hands bound behind them, and Bill Allen handcuffed and chained.

Then, after a light breakfast, the journey toward Demon Hollow was resumed, and by noon that day the journey was at an end.

Demon Hollow, although a camp of nearly two hundred people, possessed neither a jail or a courthouse, so the prisoners were placed in a small log house in the center of the village, there to remain until brought out for trial.

About fifty houses in all comprised the settlement of Demon Hollow, and these were of the rudest kind.

The village ranged along a narrow defile, on one side of which was a lofty mountain, and on the other side a stretch of rocky land dotted with stunted trees and tangled bushes, growing in patches, as far as the eye could reach.

Very few of the houses were with floors, and the furniture they contained was of the roughest kind. As for ornamentations, there was but one picture in the place; a rough oil painting of a red-shirted son of the mountains in the act of scalping an Indian. This was called "The Miner's Delight."

In short, Demon Hollow was a representative mining town. It was rough in appearance, and its citizens were rough, and many of them hardly civilized. There was only one woman in the place—a woman and a little girl. The latter was a sprightly little thing, with brown eyes and black hair and a strangely beautiful face.

"I say, Bluebell," said one of the miners, the day the prisoners were brought in, "what ye been doin' fer the past two day? I've been away you know."

"Have you?" said the little girl. "Oh, yes, I know you have. Well, I've been digging gold."

"Diggin' gold! Did ye find any?"

"Yes—found lots of it. You needn't laugh. Here is some of it done up in the corner of this handkerchief."

"Wal, that's a good girl; git all the gold ye kin, fer it's something that's mighty handy to have in the family. But, Bluebell, where is mother Tempest?"

"Out looking for me, I suppose," laughed the girl, throwing her thick black hair back from her shoulders.

At this moment a thin, small form pushed between the man and the little girl, and a shrill voice said:

"Where the world have ye been, Bluebell? I've looked for ye high and low. Now go home and stay there. There is no keeping track of the girl nohow. I'm all out o' sorts with ye. It's nothing but tramp, tramp, tramp, from morning till nig it, an' me jes' a-jumpin' to keep track of ye. I'll tie ye up, that's what I'll do, ye bad girl."

"What an old rattler you are, Mother Tempest?" observed the miner, as the old lady ceased talking a moment. "You are a tempest, that's a fact."

"I think her name suits her better than mine does me," laughed the little girl. "She is called Tempest because she is like a tempest. I am called Bluebell because—well, I don't know why. My other name is more suited to me—"

"Hush, gal! don't speak it!" cried the old woman. "It ain't right! You are Bluebell now because—well, because you are nobody else. Come, let's go to the house."

Only a few of the miners knew the true history of this little girl. They knew that she had come among them with a strange man, who called her Bluebell and who seemed to think a good deal of her, though he acknowledged she was not his child. This was his story, told in his own rough way:

"I am a man of contrasts; that's why I call this little gal Bluebell, with her brown eyes and black hair.

"It was about a month ago that I first see'd her. Thar was a lot o' us goin' from San Francisco southward, all chucked into a stagecoach.

"Wal, it was then that I see'd this little gal. Bluebell I call her now, but that wasn't what she called herself. But never mind about that. She was claimed by two rough-looking fellows, but neither of them had any right to her, in my opinion.

"Wal, the sixth day out, while going through a mountain pass, we were surprised by a band of robbers, an' then thar was the awfulest fight you ever heard tell of, and a flowing of blood and howling that was delightful.

"Do you s'pose any one escaped? I reckon not—that is, only the little girl and myself. She were saved from death—I, because I had been a robber myself once; and the little one—well, she was pretty and harmless, and they didn't like to kill her.

"So the coach was plundered, the dead passengers were relieved of their valuables, and Bluebell and I were hurried off to the hills.

"I didn't reckon on any mercy from the robbers, and didn't know what they'd do with Bluebell; but after we had been prisoners a few days the chief of the band says to me, says he: 'Joe Williams, you ought to die the death of a dog!' and then, to my astonishment, he added: 'but I won't kill you this time. You may go—you and the gal.'

"It wasn't right, I know it wasn't, to get off so easy, but thar I was, and thar was Bluebell, an' when the leetle gal said she'd go with me anywhere, I jes' gathered her up in my arms and started off on a run.

"An' now you know who we are, Bluebell and I."

Joe Williams told this story to a few of the citizens of Demon Hollow the day that he reached that town, and the next day he went to work in the gulches along with the rest of the men, but the next week, while prospecting for gold some distance from town, he fell from a mountain ledge and was dashed to pieces on the rocks below.

CHAPTER XV.

A MURDER TRIAL IN THE MOUNTAINS.

WHAT shall be done with the prisoners?

This question was asked a dozen times a day by the rough miners, until, finally, an old gold-seeker, whose word was law in the village, answered it by saying:

"It's well to give every man a fair shake for glory; let's take the sellers out and give 'em a fair trial, and if they are found guilty, hang 'em speedily and respectfully."

This suggestion was received with general satisfaction by the miners who at once began to gather around the temporary jail, hooting and shouting and demanding that the laws of Demon Hollow be enforced without further delay.

So the prisoners were brought forth for trial, Allen still in chains, but with a savage, determined face, and Jack and Andy looking pale and dejected.

"It's all up with us," said Allen to the boys in whispered tones. "I'm sorry now that we killed him."

"Killed who?" demanded Jack.

"Why, Ben Hathaway, the miner."

"We killed him!" repeated Andy. "Why, man, you are out of your head. Jack and I didn't have anything to do with it."

Allen laughed demoniacally.

"That sounds very nice," he sneered, "but it won't work. If I am guilty, so are you; at least that's my evidence. I don't intend to shufle off alone. I swear that you sellers helped kill Ben Hathaway."

"It's a black-hearted lie," cried Andy.

"It's the truth," said Allen.

The boys were horrified. Allen intended to implicate them in the murder at all events.

The wretch laughed savagely.

"We'll die together like brave men," he said, "but first let 'em prove that we are guilty."

Not having such a place as a court-house, it was the custom of the miners to hold court in the open air, near a large tree, where the criminal executions of the town were generally conducted.

"When wo string you sellers up, it'll jes' make twelve fer this year," complacently remarked a long-haired miner, turning to the prisoners.

"Don't count yer chickens afore they're hatched," snarled Allen. "I'll thank you to trot forward th best lawyer in the village, an' I'll git him to swear me out of it."

The miner laughed.

"You don't seem to grasp the regulations of Demon Hollow. Why, a law sharp couldn't live yer twenty-four hours. We're a pious community, we are."

At this juncture, a tall miner, with a white slouch hat, the rim turned up in front, and a pipe in his mouth, came forward and called the meeting to order.

The hum of voices ceased at once, and a hundred bearded faces were turned on the self-appointed chairman, who still stood with his short, black pipe in his mouth, waiting for some one else to advance an idea.

"I move that the prisoners be strung up 'ithout hesitation or delay," suggested a short, thick-set man, whose bloodthirsty disposition was manifest in the array of knives and pistols in his belt.

"No, no, no!" cried several voices.

"Give 'em a fair shake, I say," yelled a man with a long rope in his hand, "but be sure and hang 'em, fer I don't want to lug this rope way out yer fer nothing."

The jury was composed of twelve hard-fisted miners, who were selected for their wisdom and learning, as well as for the utter contempt they felt for the technicalities of common law.

The prisoners were given conspicuous positions in front of the jury, and the proceedings began. It was not a trial that was being held, but rather an

expression of opinion, and the latter all resulted the same; namely, a determination to hang the prisoners.

The red-shirted miner who had opened the investigation as chairman, was the first speaker. Removing the pipe from his mouth, he said:

"Who is thar in this crowd who didn't know Ben Hathaway? And is ther' a chap yer that didn't know Ben to be a bully boy? Don't tell me that Ben was a common feller, he wasn't,—not by a darned sight; he was a rattler. But he is dead, very dead—poor Ben Hathaway!"

He quietly fell back in the crowd, and the miner with the rope in his hand stepped forward.

"It ain't fer Ben Hathaway alone that we grieve," he began, "but he owed all of us something, an' we hate to lose it. The boots that he wore when he shoved in his checks were mine, an' the coat that he had on belonged to our worthy chairman. But he was a rattler, an' a mighty good feller. He was great on the borrow, an' mighty poor on the lend. But he is dead; he is with the angels; he has settled his fust bill—the on'y one he ever payed. Poor Ben Hathaway!"

He gave his eyes a brush with his coat-sleeve, and, like his predecessor, quietly stepped back in the crowd.

Then a little old chap, wrinkled and brown, with grizzly hair and beard and small, twinkling eyes, stepped forward and said:

"In the matter of Ben Hathaway, let me say a word. I've know'd him longer than any of ye. When he killed the sheriff of Bexar county, Texas, I was thar; when he put daylight through an Iowa preacher, I was thar. Many a time I've see'd him slash and kill, and he was always reliable—always. But he had his faults. He swore less than any man in the settlement, and would preach religion for all that was out. But I liked him for all that—we all liked him, and now he is dead. Poor Ben Hathaway!"

An approving murmur went through the crowd, and then all eyes were turned on the prisoners, with a general feeling that they should be strung up at once.

The trial then opened in earnest, and was conducted on the one principle of conviction.

Nothing that the boys could say had any influence with the miners, and they, with Allen, were condemned to die.

A yell of satisfaction went up from the crowd as this verdict was brought in; and the prisoners were at once conducted to the fatal tree near by, and three dangling ropes were soon ready to receive 'em.

"We give you just thirty minutes to say yer prayers," spoke the foreman of the jury, as the tree was reached.

Bill Allen looked dazed.

"I don't know how to pray," he said. "Give me a chaw of tobacker."

Jack and Andy were disconsolate.

"We may as well give up," said Andy.

"We are done for, I guess," returned Jack; and then brightening up, he said to one of the miners, "Bring me a violin; I want to play my last tune. I feel like playing now."

A violin was brought him, by an accommodating miner, and he began to play.

The strains were soft and sweet, and, withal, plaintive in the extreme. Jack had never played so well before in all his life.

The miners were deeply touched; they stood around in mute surprise, some with their heads bent forward, others with their faces turned aside, and all wondering.

The music even went so far as to penetrate the distant cabin where Mother Tempest and Bluebell lived, and the little girl, catching the far-away strains, looked out the door and said:

"There's a gallant crowd up by the gallows-tree. What does it mean?"

"Another hanging bee, I reckon," was the short reply.

"What! and I not there!" cried the queer little girl, starting up.

"It ain't no place for you, Bluebell," spoke the old woman.

"It's a mean trick, I think," muttered the little girl, not heeding what was said by her companion.

"What's mean, Bluebell?"

"Why to shuile them fellers off without letting me know it. I'll go up there this minute."

She started off on a run straight for the tree, her black hair flying in the wind, and not once did she stop until she had reached her destination.

Then she saw the three prisoners standing close together while preparations for their execution were going on, and pushing through the crowd, she heard one of the miners say in a loud voice, "Time's up," and her little heart began to beat wildly.

Jack still held the violin to his breast, but the moment he saw the little girl, with her bright brown eyes and flying hair, he started back and fairly screamed:

"Gipsy, Gipsy! save me! save me!"

The little girl pushed through the crowd; her eyes were wild, and her face was flushed with excitement.

"Gipsy! Gipsy!" repeated Jack.

She was within a dozen feet of him now, and when he called her the second time, and held out his hands to her, she gave one wild scream, and the next moment she was folded in his arms, sobbing wild and loud.

Then one of the miners sprung forward and tried to release her, but she fought him back with her little clinched fist, and cried:

"Stand back; you shall not harm him. It is Jack. Stand back, I say. I know Jack has done nothing wrong. He is my friend."

There was not a miner among them all that did not love the little girl, and her word was law with them.

But what did she mean by interfering with the proceedings?

The miners asked themselves this question, and finally the foreman of the jury, who had the execution in charge, demanded:

"Shall the hangin' go on?"

"Ask Bluebell," replied the men.

"Jack shall not die," declared the little girl.

"Who is this boy you call Jack?" asked one of the miners. "Whar did you ever see him afore?"

"In Kentucky," replied the little girl. "I know him well. I was not Bluebell then. I was Gipsy Templeton."

"What do ye say, boys, shall we hang this young chap, or not?" asked the foreman of the jury.

"Let him go," was the general response.

The foreman of the jury cut the cords with which Jack's feet were bound, then Gipsy said:

"Come on, Jack."

"But Andy?" demanded the boy.

A murmur went through the crowd.

"Andy goes with me, or I go with Andy," said Jack, resolutely.

"Then who'll be left to swing?" asked a long-haired miner, stepping forward.

The executioner pointed to Allen, then turning, freed Andy with his knife, and the two boys, guided by Gipsy, walked slowly down the hill.

"This thing is like the measles," growled Bill Allen; "but somehow it don't seem to take me. I say, Gipsy, can't ye put in a word fer yer old friend?"

But Gipsy was out of hearing now, and Bill Allen was in the clutches of the rude law of Demon Hollow.

For a while the boys could hardly realize that they were free.

It seemed to Jack that he was dreaming; that this was not Gipsy Templeton, but some one else.

"But I am the same Gipsy," said the little girl, "and I think you are the same Jack. It has been

three years since you played for me on the stile near the old plantation. Do you remember?"

Jack had not forgotten the circumstance, for that was the turning point of his career.

"Where have you been all this time, Gipsy?" asked Jack.

"It's a long story," replied the little girl; "but you shall know all after awhile."

By this time they had reached the cabin of Mother Tempest, and the latter was at the door to receive them.

A few words from Gipsy apprised the old woman of all that had happened down by the "gallows tree," "and now," said the little girl, "you must call me 'Gipsy,' not 'Bluebell.'"

A distant shout at this moment, as of a hundred voices in chorus, startled the three into silence.

"They have put an end to his life," finally spoke up Gipsy.

"Bill Allen?" said Jack.

"Yes—Bill Allen."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE YOUNG GOLD-DIGGERS.

The two boys soon learned to respect their rough miner friends, and the latter took great pains to explain to them the mysteries of the mines.

"Thar's nothin' like knowin' how to begin a thing," remarked one of the men, as the boys began their first search for gold. "Did ye ever dig potatoes?"

"No."

"Wal, ye can't dig gold the same way. Some people thinks they kin, though, but they git fooled. What's necessary is a sharp eye an' good judgment. Now, ef ye want to git rich, don't stop to consider, but pitch right in."

The boys were very willing to do something for themselves, so they went regularly to work, and it was not long before they were very proficient miners.

So the weeks passed, and our young friends toiled daily in the mines the same as the rest, and Bluebell, now Gipsy, made them frequent visits, tripping from one gulch to another, and more than one wearied miner was cheered to new exertion by her light song and joyous mirth.

The little girl had told the boys all about herself; how she was stolen by the Gipsy hand, of which King Victor was leader; how two or three weeks later she was again stolen, this time by two rough men who held her for many months in hopes of receiving a large reward for her return; how she had been brought to California and kept for many months on a rude plantation, far away from city or town; and, finally, how her captors had been killed by robbers, and then how she had been taken care of by Joe Williams and finally brought to Demon Hollow, where she had lived ever since in comparative happiness.

"They are all so very kind to me," she said, slacking of her miner friends; "and as for Mother Tempest, she is the kindest woman in the world. She was here when I came, and we have lived together ever since."

Some days after, when Jack told her that her father was dead, and the manner of his death, she could hardly realize it, and for many days her young heart was overflowing with grief. Although it had been three years since she last saw him, and she was very young then, she had a vivid remembrance of the old plantation, of her father, and of all the circumstances attending her disappearance from home.

"I thought I might some time find my way back there," she said one day to Jack; "but I have no wish to go now. All the friends I have in the world are here, and here I shall stay."

About six months following the advent of our boy friends into the mines, an excitement was raised concerning a new gold field, to the west of Demon Hollow about eighty miles. It was claimed that the

new mines were wonderfully productive, turning out more than a hundred dollars a day to the man.

No sooner was the news received than a company of about twenty-five of the inhabitants of Demon Hollow started for the New Eldorado.

Among those who took the fever and went were Gipsy, Jack, Andy, Mother Tempest and an old miner known as Mournful Mose.

The latter was a queer old man, who had lived in the mines many years, and by hard work had accumulated considerable of a fortune. He was a great friend of Gipsy, and rumor had it that his friendship extended to Mother Tempest, whom he had promised to make his wife some time in the near future.

Be this as it may, he thought a great deal of Gipsy, and the little girl made him her constant in all things.

The new gold fields, whither our friends were bound, were situated in a wild portion of the mountains, and the whole country intervening was a desolate waste of sand and rocks; and, besides, was inhabited by the merciless Apaches, a tribe of Indians more bloodthirsty and cruel than any other in the West.

"If we are able to keep clear of the Apaches," remarked Mournful Mose, the first day out, "I reckon thar'll be no other trouble. I never did like the Apaches."

"They are a bad lot," spoke up another miner.

"I've had a leetle to do with 'em myself, and I can't say that I admire their style. All I ask is for the rascals to keep out of our way."

The first few days of the journey were made without accident or trouble of any kind. The party were well supplied with provisions, and, besides, were well armed and had ammunition in abundance.

The sixth day out, however, something happened that created considerable uneasiness among our friends. During the night a horse was stolen from the camp. At least, a horse was missing in the morning, and the general supposition was that it had been stolen. Then the question arose—who stole it?

"Injuns," declared one of the miners.

Was there any certainty of this?

Yes.

Moccasin tracks in the sand!

The tracks were examined closely by Mournful Mose, who gave as his opinion that the camp had been visited in the night by Indians, how many he could not say.

"Are they likely to come again?" asked Jack.

"No surer thing in the world," returned Mournful Mose.

He was right.

The next day four mounted Indians appeared to view a short distance from the train, and for an hour or two kept in sight; they were well mounted and armed, and were without doubt hostile to the whites.

"I wish I could speak to them," said Mournful Mose; "I might find out their intentions. I'd rather they'd give us a call now than after dark."

The old miner got his wish in a very short time.

After circling around the camp of the whites a few times that evening, the four savages rode boldly up to within speaking distance, and one of them called out:

"Halloo!"

Mournful Mose answered him.

"What do you want?" he said.

"Where come from?" asked the savage.

"Demon Hollow," replied the miner. "What ye goin' to do about it?"

"Nothing," said the red-skin, and then added quickly: "What doing here?"

"Nothing," growled Mournful Mose; "jist travelin'."

There was a glitter of fiendish cunning in the eyes of the savage as he asked the next question.

"Which way now—east, west, north, south?"

"I'll tell ye some other time," replied the miner.

"Where do you live, you red scamps?"

The spokesman of the savages pointed to the distant hills, and said, speaking in his native tongue:

"You are only a few; we are many. Take a handful of sand and count the grains, then you will know the strength of the tribe of Rolling Thunder. His warriors are the bravest of the brave; they are true as steel; they are like wolves on the scent of blood."

A murmur of satisfaction went through the savage crowd as this last was spoken, and then, without another word, the red intruders turned and galloped away.

"They are sure to come back," said Andy; "so the best thing we can do is to leave this place at once."

"Where shall we go?" asked Jack.

A prolonged yell, sounding more than a mile away, was heard at this moment.

"Can it be that the red-skins are returning?" said Andy.

"Yes—and this time a hundred strong," replied Mournful Mose. "Quick! we have no time to lose. Do you see that ledge of rocks? Hurry the horses forward. The rocks! the rocks!"

With all possible speed our friends made for the rocky ledge, the wagon was hurried forward, the horses were relieved of harness and trappings; the men rolled huge boulders under the wagon, and around it, rocks were piled one upon another, and thus a tolerably secure retreat was made.

What next?

In less than half an hour the whole prairie seemed alive with whooping, shouting savages.

They were a bloodthirsty looking crowd, all well mounted and armed, and with their faces streaked with paint and their bodies hideously decorated with painted images of reptiles and wild beasts.

The leader of the savage crowd, seeing how the whites were situated, halted his warriors, and a general consultation was had for a few minutes. Then he rode forward a short distance, and, halting, with a grand flourish of head and arms, began:

"Rolling Thunder, the mighty chief of the Apaches, would speak to the white dog miner who hides himself in the rocks. Let him come out."

This was spoken in the Indian tongue, and at once Mournful Mose replied in the same language.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" he asked, showing his burly form above the rocks.

"I am Rolling Thunder," replied the chief; "I am a great warrior; I have killed many men; I am powerful and brave. What business have you here? You are thieves."

Several of the miners understood this, and they clutched their rifles with nervous hands, and a shout went up from the rocks that made the chief wheel his horse and dash away like mad.

Then the red-skins began to howl and whoop like so many demons, and every moment they seemed on the point of making a furious rush at the whites, but the chief restrained them, and again they howled and shouted; they were like madmen, fiercer than wild beasts on the scent of blood.

"An infuriated mob!" exclaimed one of the miners. "There is no mercy in their hearts, depend upon it!"

The savages numbered eighty warriors, and each had a gleaming tomahawk in his hand, and in every swarthy face there was stamped an inhuman desire for blood.

"Can they take us?" was the question asked by several of the men.

"Not alive," answered Mournful Mose.

Several times the red rascals made a show of charging the rocky fortress of the whites, but these feints amounted to nothing more than a little waste of powder and ball by both whites and reds.

Finally the savages dismounted and sent their horses away in charge of several warriors.

What did this mean?

The miners were prepared for any emergency. Let the red-skins do their worst.

The savage rascals were determined not to allow the whites to escape, at all events, for they placed a strong guard at every point where the enemy would be likely to strike should they desire or attempt to leave the rocks.

"They are trying to surround us so that we never can get out," said Andy. "See; every point is guarded. Maybe they expect to starve us into submission."

"Very likely," returned Mournful Mose.

This was the evident intention of the red-skins now.

"I'll venture that all of 'em are not Indians," remarked Jack to the old miner an hour later.

"What makes you think so, Jack?"

"Can't tell why I think so, but then I do. I have an idea that some other fellers are mixed up in the row."

"Just what I think," returned the miner.

He was about to say more when a sudden suspicious movement on the part of the red-skins attracted his attention.

"What is it?" said Jack.

"I reckon we are wrong about them trying to starve us out," replied the miner. "See, they are even now preparing to charge us."

Mournful Mose was right. With a fierce yell, like so many wild beasts on the scent of blood, the savages rushed forward, firing their rifles as they ran, swinging their tomahawks, howling, yelling, shrieking, making in all a thrilling, maddening scene.

For the first few minutes it seemed hardly possible for the whites to hold their own. In spite of repeated volleys from the rocks, the savage crowd of dusky devils pushed on. They gained the rocks at last; then followed a hand-to-hand fight of a nature terrible in the extreme.

The whites used their rifles with deadly effect, and every second one more of the savages shrieked and fell.

"Give them no quarter," cried Mournful Mose.

A mad yell from the leader of the savages followed this command, and shriek and shout, the clash of arms mingling with a din of discordant sounds, and the battle was at its height. The whites fought with desperation, but the red-skins were too many for them, and every moment it seemed that the battle must close in their favor.

But unexpected help was near. A chorus of shouts sounded on the air, and the next moment a squad of mounted men thundered up, and without waiting to ask questions, began a furious attack on the Indians. The latter were thrown into confusion at once and were soon put to flight.

"We heard the fun from a distance," said the leader of the mounted rangers—for such they proved to be—"and concluded to take a hand in it ourselves. It seems to have been a bloody piece of business."

The ranger party was composed of about twenty men, five of whom were English tourists, on their way to San Francisco.

"I trust you are all safe," remarked one of the latter, a tall man in spectacles; and then, lowering his voice, he continued, "the battle has not been entirely in your favor; some of your party are dead."

Four of the miners had been killed outright, and two were slightly wounded: the rest had escaped without injury.

It was not deemed safe to remain long in that part of the country, so the dead were quickly buried and as rapidly as possible the whole party hurried away in the direction of Demon Hollow. The miners had paid dearly for their trip, and Jack and Andy both declared themselves satisfied to return to the gold fields of Demon Hollow, where, if gold was not as plentiful as in some other places, the digging of it was not attended with so much

danger. As for Mother Tempest and Gipsy, they, too, were anxious to get home. The only one who grieved at leaving was Mournful Mose, and the reason of this was that four of his old friends had been left behind—buried in the sand.

The journey to Demon Hollow was made quickly. There was no stopping to rest, no waiting for stragglers, no hesitating as to the way; it was a tireless, rapid march, which came to an end at midnight of the second day, when Demon Hollow was reached.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LOST IS FOUND.

AMONG the English tourists spoken of in the preceding chapter was a young lad about the age of Jack, a relative of the leader of the party, an elderly gentleman, known as Doctor Wayne. The name of this boy was Gilbert Masters, a retiring youth, whose prominence in this particular arises from the fact that between him and Jack there was a striking resemblance. This resemblance had not been noticed at first, but now that all thought of danger from Indians was over, and the tourists and miners had become better acquainted with each other, this striking likeness between Jack and Gilbert Masters was observed by all. Even Gipsy spoke of it, and asked Jack if this shy English boy were not his brother.

"Not that I know of," replied Jack. "I haven't any brother, haven't any sister—but you, Gipsy—and haven't any mother or father. Gilbert may be some other feller's brother, but he certainly isn't mine."

Nobody seemed to think seriously of the matter—nobody in the village; it was a matter of jest and talk. Only one person looked upon the circumstance in the light of fact, and that person was Doctor Wayne. Calling Jack aside one day, he said:

"I have watched you closely, boy, and now I want to know your history. I have a feeling that I should know you better. Who are you?"

"I am Jack, only Jack," was the quick reply. "I haven't any history."

"No past—no history?"

"Nothing," said Jack. "All I know is that I was brought up in the streets—brought up to play the fiddle. There's jes' the slightest notion in my head of once having crossed a big water, but this must have been when I was very young. I tell you, sir, I don't know who I am."

Dr. Wayne did not reply; but that evening, in the presence of Jack and Andy, Mother Tempest, Gipsy, Mournful Mose, Gilbert Masters and several others, he told the following story:

"Fourteen or fifteen years ago there lived in England a family by the name of Masters, consisting of father, mother, two sons, and a daughter. The latter died in infancy, and the father, who was an officer in the army, was killed in battle. A short time following this last event, the mother, with the two children, went to Italy, where, shortly after her arrival, the mother was called upon to endure a new trial, one that seemed almost unendurable. I must tell you here that her sons were twins, and as nearly alike in face and form as two persons could be. Their ages were about three years. Their names were Gilbert and Arthur Masters. The trial was this: the little boy Arthur disappeared suddenly one day, and no effort on the part of his mother and her friends could find him. The belief was, among those who knew the country, and its people, that the boy had been stolen; but all else concerning him was wrapped in mystery and doubt. As for the mother, her grief was terrible: she did not live long after this; she died of a broken heart. You may like to know how I became acquainted with these strange circumstances. I will tell you. This lady was my only sister, and I was with her at the time her little son disappeared. After the death

or the mother I assumed the responsibility of rearing the little boy Gilbert, and it is he who is with me now. As for Arthur, so far my search for him has been in vain. I have wandered from one city to another, always with eyes intent on the street, hoping to see some one that would answer the description of the lost boy."

"And where do you think he is now?" spoke up Jack, with manifest interest.

"My idea is this," replied Dr. Wayne, closely scrutinizing the lad: "Arthur was not killed by robbers, or drowned, as some thought, or lost in Italy; he fell into the clutches of Italian speculators, who took him to America, where, in some great city, he has wandered the streets for years begging, or, perhaps, playing the violin, at the instance of a cruel master, such as there are in cities, who live off of the earnings of minstrel boys who are treated worse than slaves. This I think was the fate of the little boy Arthur."

There was a moment of silence, following which Jack spoke.

"It seems like a dream," he said, "just like a dream. I think I see myself once more in the streets of New York, tramping to and fro, playing the violin, and it is awful plain to me now who I am. If you please, sir, am I not the lost boy, Arthur?"

"The proof is on your arm," was the quick reply. "Is there a mark on your arm of indelible ink after the form of an anchor? If so, you are the boy."

Jack bared his arm at once, and there near the elbow was a mark like an anchor that had been worked into the flesh with a needle.

"Bare your arm also, Gilbert," said the doctor.

The boy did so, and a similar mark was found on his arm.

"The lost is found," spoke up Doctor Wayne, excitedly. "Jack, you and Gilbert are brothers; you are the lost boy Arthur. I thought so from the very first, and now I know it; the mark on the arm proves it beyond a doubt. It was done by an old sailor one day without the knowledge of the mother, and time has not effaced it. Happy am I to have found the lost boy. How strange the fate that has thrown us together!"

When it became known about the camp what had happened to Jack, the interest manifested was great; congratulations were extended to him on all sides, and there was a universal feeling of joy at his good fortune.

The English party were also very happy, and the good Doctor Wayne put aside his usual dignity and joined in the general rejoicing. As for Jack, he scarcely knew what to do with himself. That night he slept very little; his thoughts were busy with the lead past and undeveloped future of his existence.

The next day, while still in this mental condition, he met Mournful Mose wandering alone on the outskirts of the village. The old miner was talking to himself and acting in a strange way.

"You see things ain't jist as they orter be," he said, as the boy asked him the cause of his strange melancholy. "Seems as how one trouble fellers o'ther as close as kin be; jist now it's Gipsy I'm thinkin' of, an', somehow, I don't grasp things as I orter. You see, the leetle gal is kind o' blue-like since she knows you're going away, an' I'm jist thinkin' about sending her away, too. Do you know whar thar is a good school, Jack?"

"San Francisco, I suppose," said the boy.

"Well, thar's whar I'm going to send her; and, Jack, I'm going to give her wealth enough to last her all her days. I kin do it, fer I've been saltin' it down for years."

"And where are you going," asked Jack, "if Gipsy goes to 'Frisco?"

"I'll go somewhar else. It's a new route I'm going to take, and you need not ask me any particulars."

"He's had trouble with Mother Tempest," said Jack to himself, as he moved away. "I think I know what it is. He is not keeping his promise with

her; he promised to marry her, and now he is trying to get out of it. They have had a big quarrel, I suppose, which has made the old man reckless. I don't blame him, though, for not wanting to marry her. Poor old man."

Jack returned to his cabin, and Mournful Mose continued his rambling walk.

Down at the foot of the gulch Gipsy met him, and there was a look in his eyes that she had never seen before.

"Gipsy," he said, bending over her.

"Well?"

"I've got something to tell you, girl, something that'll make you stare. I'm going away, Gipsy, going to leave you, going for good."

"No!"

"It's a fact. Things are too hot for me here; I've got to skip."

Gipsy asked the reason why, although she knew without asking, and Mournful Mose did not care to inform her.

"I'll leave at once," he said, "leave for good. If it wasn't fer leaving you, Gipsy, I wouldn't care a cent."

"No, no, you shall not go," cried the little girl, all her child-nature aroused.

He put his great strong arm around her, and with his whiskered face close to her own, whispered to her:

"It ain't as if I's 'feard to go, Gipsy, fer I ain't a darn bit. And then I'll fix everything fer you solid. I want you to go to school up in 'Frisco, and I'll send you thar at once. I'll make arrangements fer you to-night, fer to-morrow I'll be gone. I want you to go with Jack and the Englishers, and they'll see that ye git safely to school."

The last rays of the setting sun bathed the valley with a crimson glory, and looking at the deepening shadows on the mountain side, Mournful Mose whispered:

"It's gettin' late, Gipsy; better go in out of the damp. Every now and then a gust of wind comes up from the valley that makes me shiver. Better go in, I say, Gipsy, out of the damp."

He stooped and kissed her, and the next moment disappeared among the shadows. Then she called to him, but received no reply; and then, with her young heart almost ready to break, she stood and watched the moon come out, and listened to every sound that fell. An hour passed, and then she heard footsteps approaching, and the next moment Mournful Mose stood before her.

"Glad ye haven't gone, Gipsy," he said, "fer I wanted to see ye. Do you see this little box, Gipsy? Well, thar is a trifle of money in it and some papers of value; an', then, thar is a letter in it to an old friend o' mine in 'Frisco, a childless old feller; give the letter to him and he'll see that you're fixed solid for the future. Don't hang around here long, Gipsy, fer I want to know that ye are in safe hands arter I am gone. Be a good girl. Good-by."

Before Gipsy could think what to say or do, before she could even look through her tears, he was gone.

Then she hurried back to the house, and in the presence of Mother Tempest and Jack who happened to be there, opened the box.

There wasn't much to see—only a small wallet of silver and some papers. Of the latter, one was a check on a bank in San Francisco for five thousand dollars. Then there was a letter addressed to Rev. Henry Brigham, giving the number and street of his residence, and setting forth the history of Gipsy in full, ending with a desire that the reverend gentleman should become a father to the little waif and bring her up in the way she should go. There was a good deal more in the letter, but this was the substance.

"But Mournful Mose?" said Jack; "what does he mean by this?"

"He is going away," said Gipsy; "he told me so to-night."

"I don't believe it!" spoke up Mother Tempest; "I don't believe it. Go to bed, Gipsy. I am tired of your clatter."

An hour later Gipsy was asleep and dreaming. She dreamed of the new life that was opening to her; and then the scene shifted, and she saw the strange old man, he who had been to her father and friend, standing on the edge of the dark cañon, the sand shivering under his feet, his wild, haggard face turned toward the sky; but when she reached out her arms to save him she awoke with her heart fluttering wildly and her pillow bathed in tears.

"Have you seen Mournful Mose this morning?" she asked Mother Tempest as the latter came into the room.

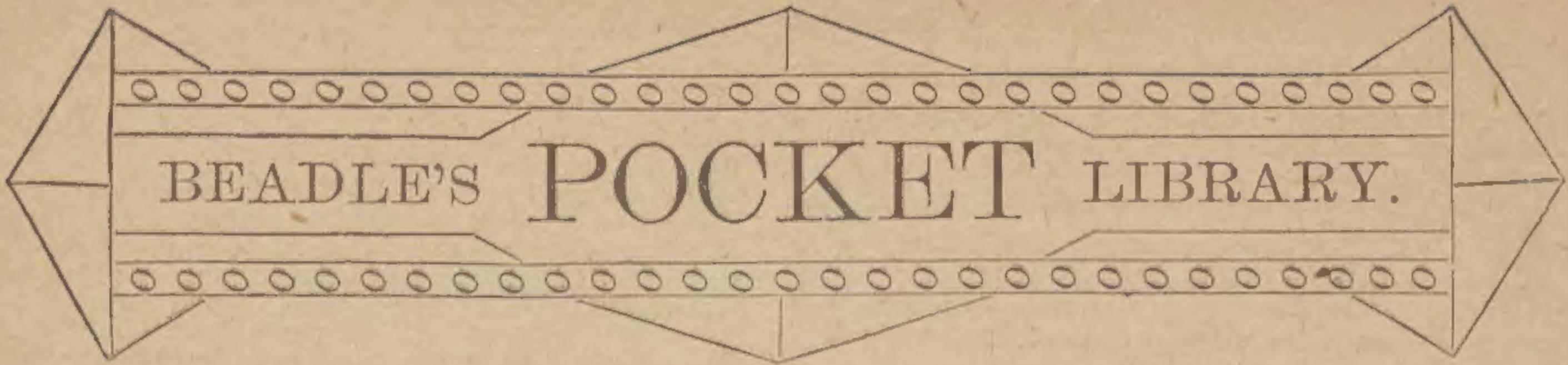
"No!" she replied, shortly; "and I don't want to see him. I have had enough of Mournful Mose."

Gipsy did not know where he had gone; but early that morning, when the miners went to their work, they found him at the head of the gulch, lying on his face in the sand.

He had placed a pistol to his head, and deliberately left the world.

And now there is little left to tell. In company with their English friends, Jack, Andy, and Gipsy went to San Francisco. The legacy of poor old Mournful Mose proved to be of a substantial character; the money was found in the bank, and Rev. Henry Brigham was no myth. He accepted with great delight the charge which had been consigned to him by his wayward brother, known to the reader as Mournful Mose. Gipsy was given a good home, and the money left her by her miner friend was expended on her education. As for Jack and Andy, they were inseparable. Both were placed in school at San Francisco, at the expense of Doctor Wayne, and a few months following, both accompanied this gentleman to England, where Jack, at the age of twenty-one, came into possession of a large fortune left him by his parents.

And Gipsy Templeton—well, she changed her name shortly after Jack reached his majority, and the old love between the two grows brighter and brighter as the years go by.



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